



PLAYING IN THE

FINAL **THIRD**

10 SESSIONS TO HELP YOUR TEAM SCORE MORE GOALS



by **DANNY CARVALHO**

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More Goals**

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Introduction

It is with great pleasure and responsibility that this e-book about such an important and game changing topic was produced. Playing in the final third with quality and effectively becomes a big challenge for coaches in a time where football becomes featured as an invasion game where defenses get more and more compact day after day, making teams who like to play a possession-based style of play work hard to find and create gaps as well as effective and efficient goal attempts.

As a Brazilian coach, but firstly a massive lover of the game, this is a topic that enchants me and pushes me to the limit of my football IQ and creativity to design troubleshooting sessions that will give my teams the ability to break and disrupt solid defenses.

It is a very motivational challenge to work and develop players who will continue the legacy of Pelé, Garrincha, Zico, Romario, Rivaldo, Ronaldo, Ronaldinho, Kaká and Neymar among many others throughout history.

It goes without saying that practicing footwork, SAQ and technical drills is very important, useful, and helpful. Although I consider this to be less hard to build and create than effective small-sided games and game situation activities. Therefore, I focused on a more game-based approach for these 10 sessions. You will find some drills, but it will always be specific to the upcoming activity, a preparation to the systemic activity to come.

On sessions 1, 2 and 3 you will find a bigger concentration on the 1v1 and 2v1 aspects of playing in the final third. When to dribble short, when to take a big touch, when to pass and other topics related.

On sessions 4 and 5 talk more about spacing, making the field bigger and structuring well the width and depth of the field to drag opponents out of their positions and create gaps.

Session 6 is about an individual topic that many players struggle to perform and a number of coaches struggle with creating activities and designing sessions to practice that ability.

Sessions 7, 8, 9 and 10 are all about speed of play, making wide areas dangerous for opponents and productive for your own team as well as the movement off the ball.

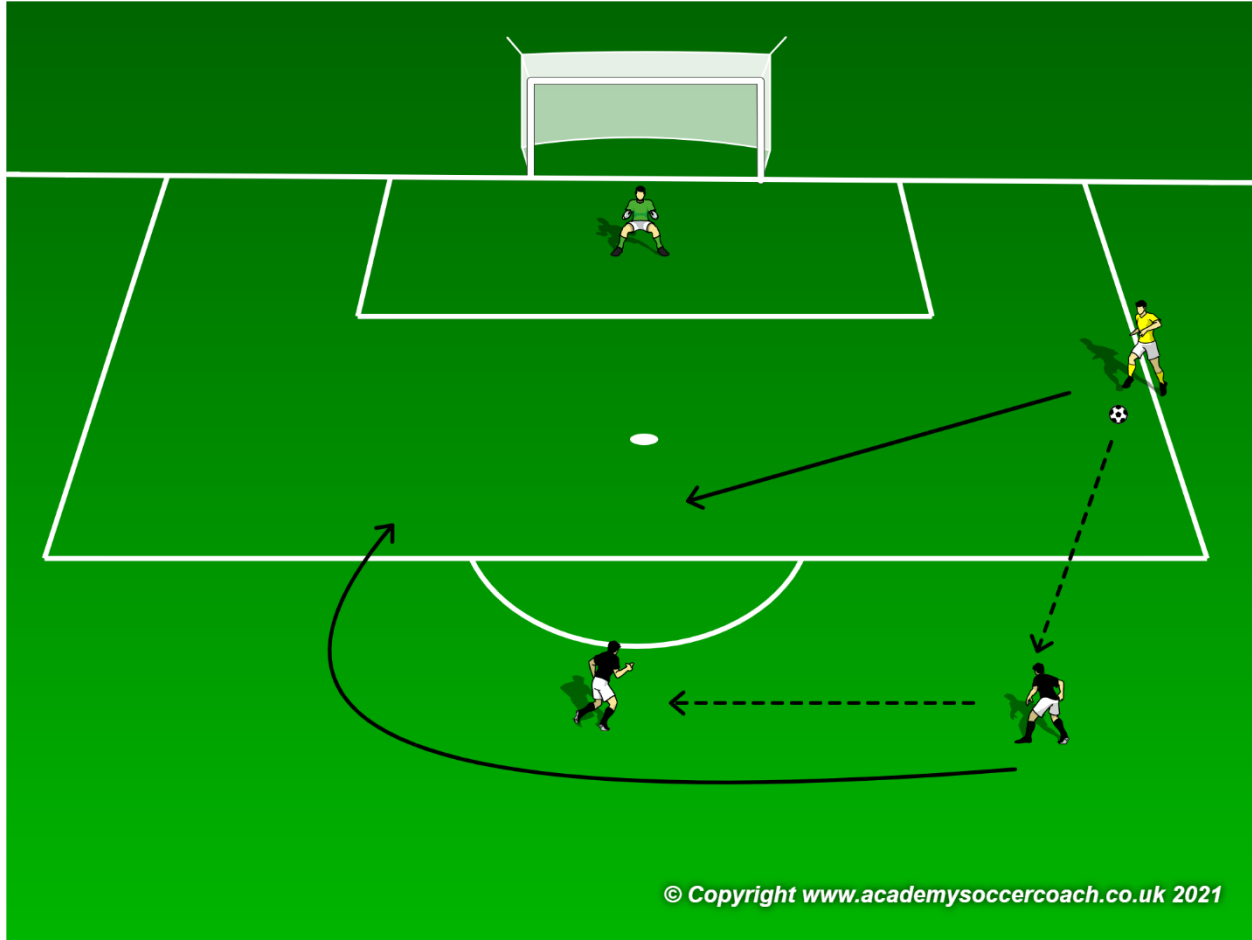
Bear with me through the next pages, trust the process and captivate your teams with these 10 sessions to help your team score more goals and spread the joy all around every single field you play in!

Session 1 – Make the most of your 1v1s and 2v1s

With the modern game having more and more compact defenses, our teams need to create as many goal attempts as possible and make the most of each chance created. This session is all about flair, creativity and scoring goals!

Warm Up

A 2v1 game situation on the top of the box to get the players to work on knowing when to pass or when to dribble in case they have the ball. Also, getting open, staying outside, and creating doubt in the defender's head in case they are the supporting player without the ball.

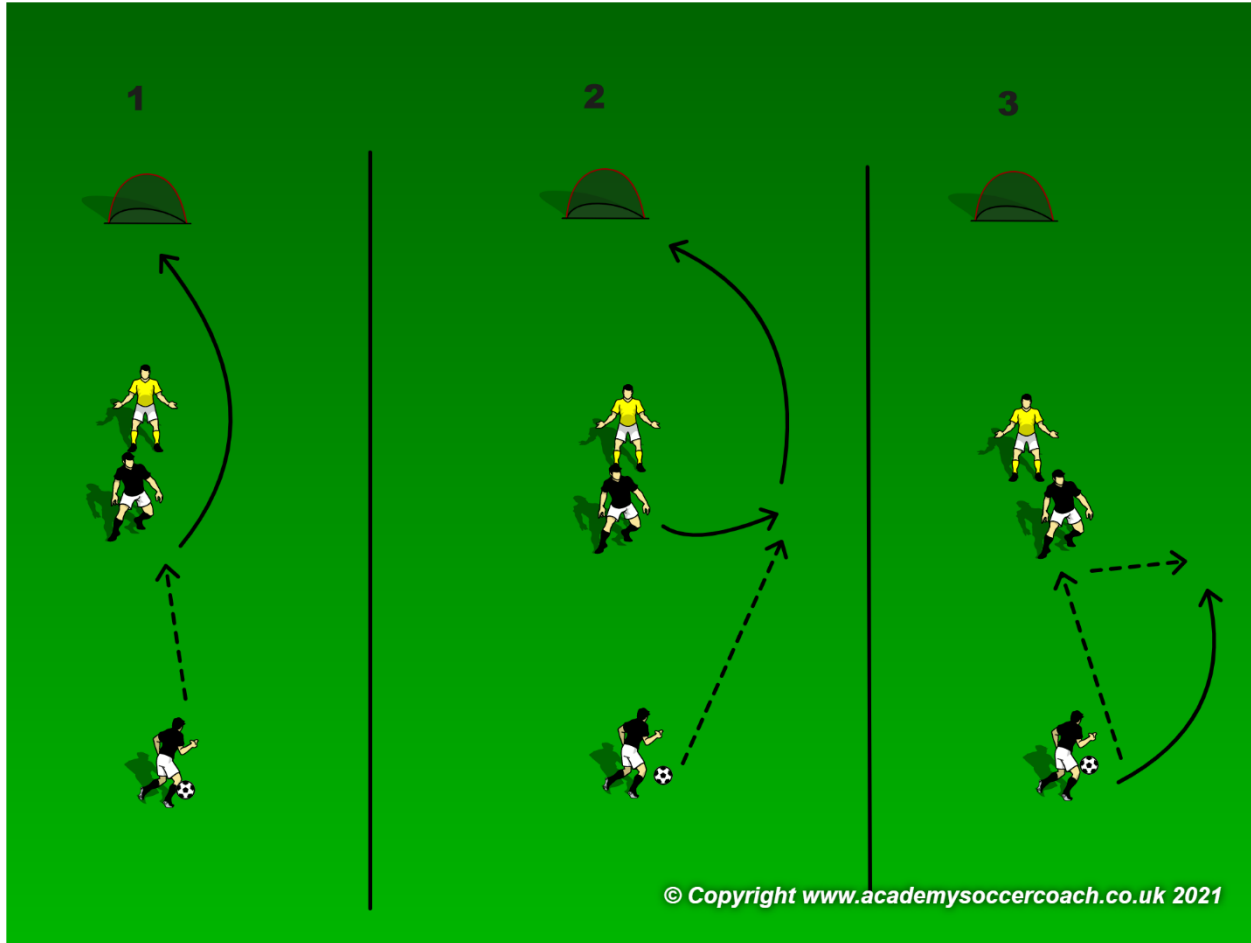


COACHING POINTS

- Commit the defender
- Get wide and far from each other
- Be fast and direct

Activity 1

- 1-) 1v1 starting with the back to the defender to try to turn and beat the defender to score
- 2-) 1v1 starting with the back to the defender and then making a move to lose the marker and receive the ball on the space to beat the defender and score
- 3-) 2v1 starting with a 1-2 combination to beat the defender and score.

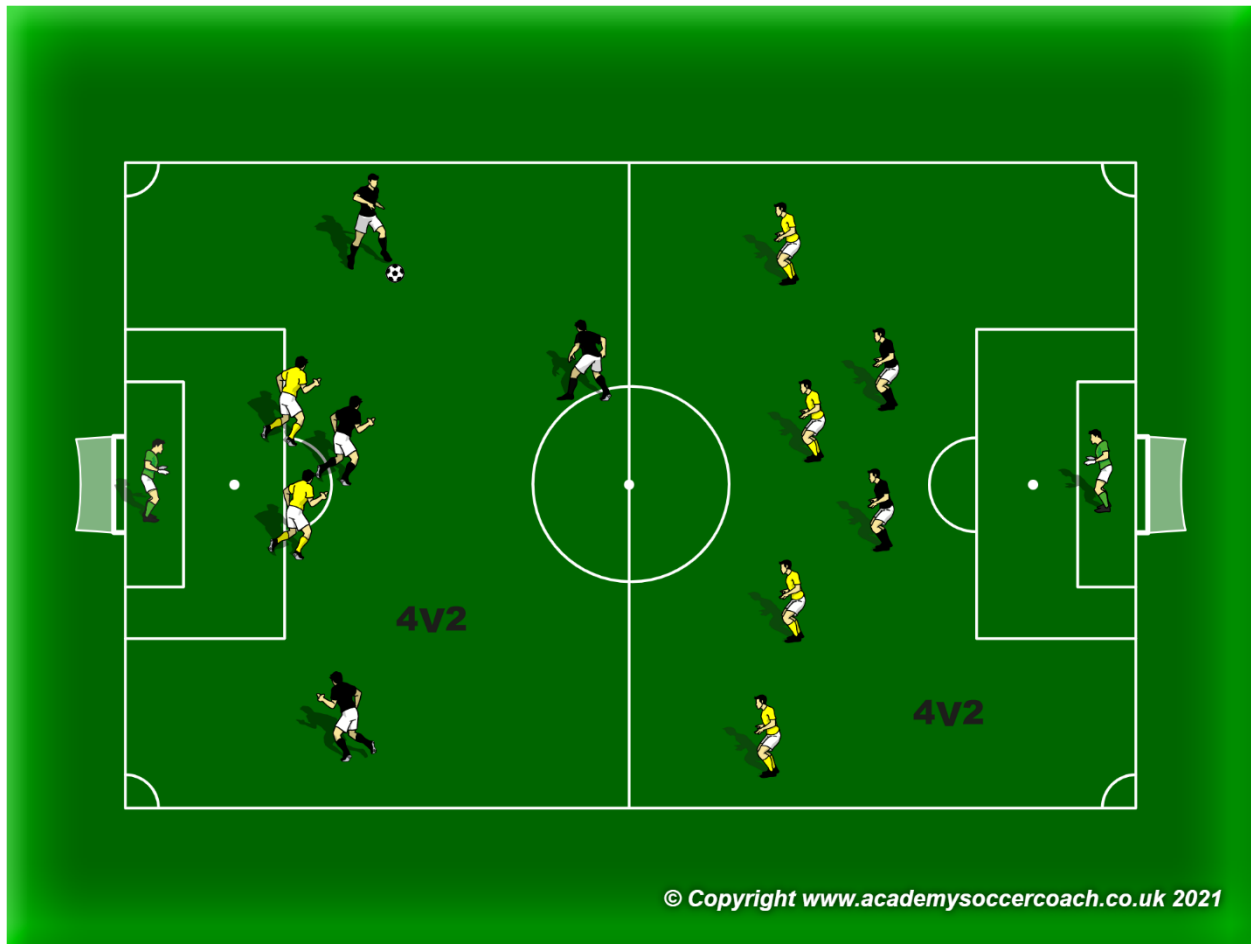


COACHING POINTS:

- Play on back foot
- Shield the ball
- Check your shoulders
- Fake and disguise

Activity 2

On a 7v7 field, each team will play 1GK + 2 Defenders + 4 Attackers. The players are not allowed to merge from one half to another no matter what. This way, teams will always play 4v2 on the attacking half.



COACHING POINTS:

- Take advantage of the overload and finish it quickly
- Play directly
- Manipulate the opposition

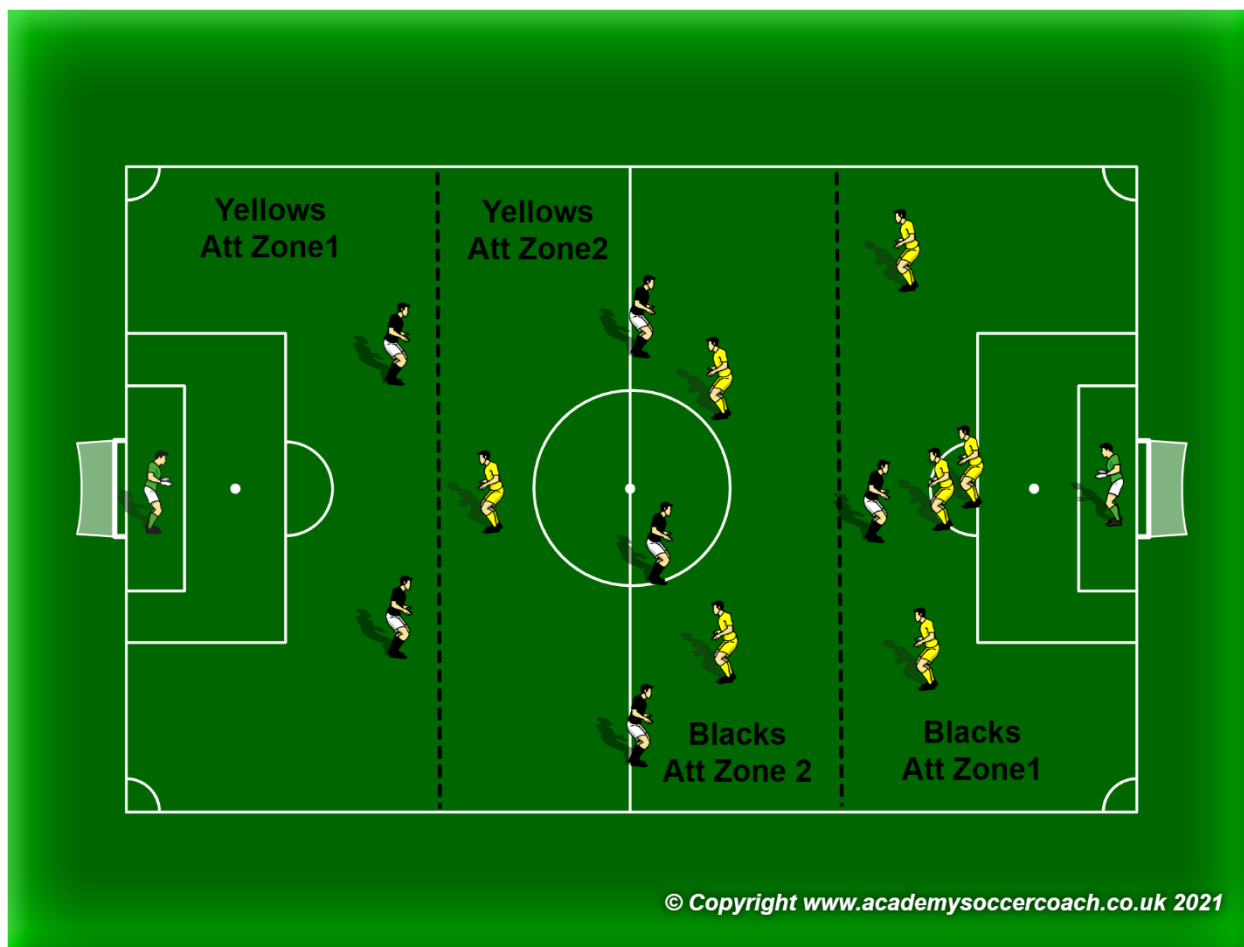
PROGRESSIONS:

- 10 seconds to finish the play
- 1 player is allowed to merge fields (5v3)
- Shot on goal = 1 point / Goal scored = 3 points

Activity 3

End with a small-sided scrimmage with the following scoring rules:

- Finish from attacking zone 1 saved by GK = 1 point
- Finish from attacking zone 2 with saved by GK = 2 points
- Goal scored on attacking zone 1 = 3 points
- Goal scored on defending zone 2 = 5 points



The objective of this scoring rules is to get the players to be attacking minded the whole time, always looking into opportunities to attempt to score.

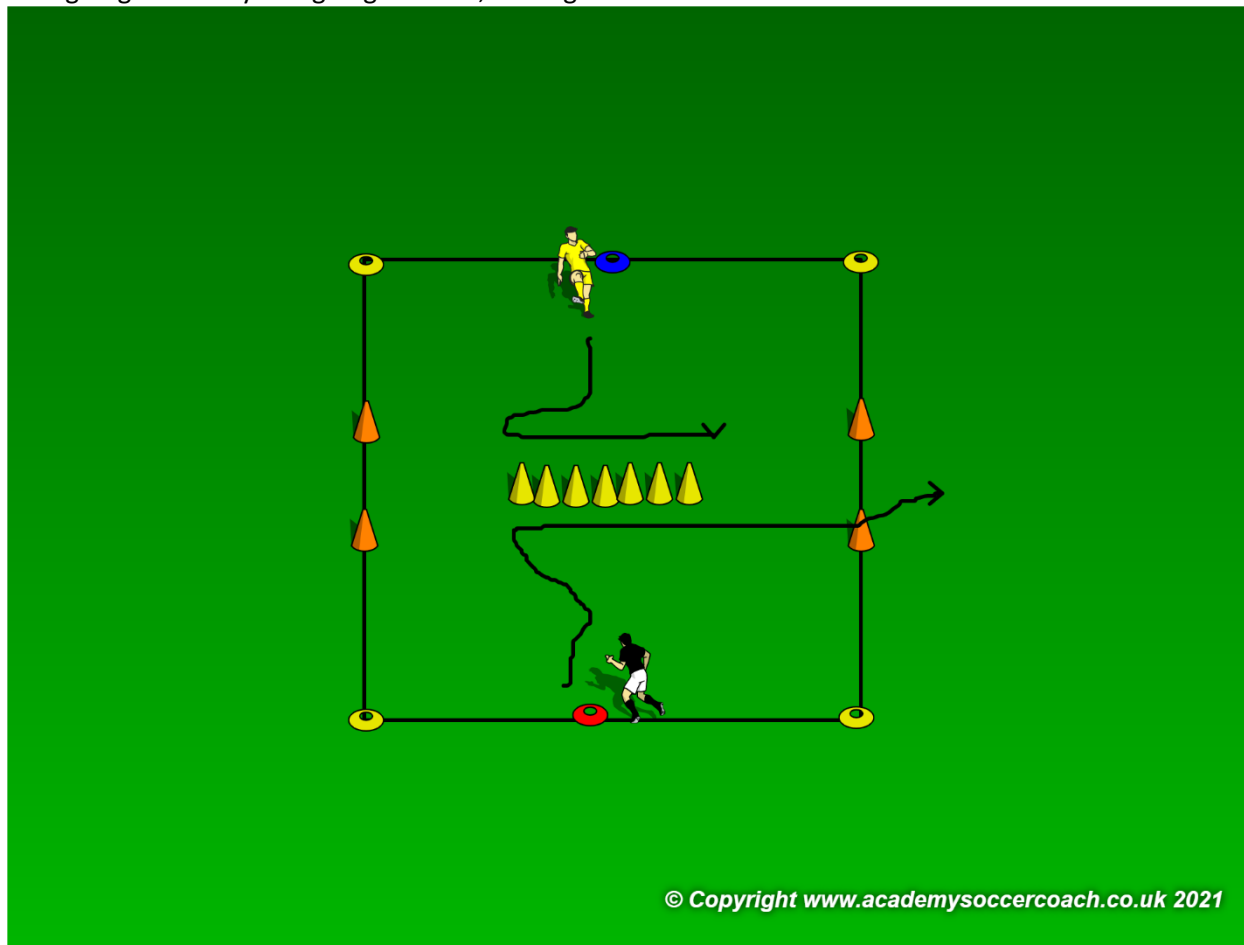
A possible progression if you diagnose that the team is forcing shots from far when is not a good decision (just to try to get more points in any way), is:

- Shot out of bounds = -1 point
- The points from GK saves will only count if there is a rebound from the GK. If the GK holds it, no points earned

Session 2 – Beat the defender, win your 1v1s!

Warm up – Activity 1

This one is called “The electric fence”. Set up a square with cones side by side in the middle (the electric fence) and a gate on each side. Starting without the ball as tag 1v1, each player starts on opposing side, facing the fence. (A) has the goal to escape the square through one of the gates as (B)’s goal is to tag (A). Player (B) is not allowed to jump over the fence so the game forces (B) to run around which gives (A) some advantage. The objective of having “the electric fence” is to separate them and having the (A) player to work and understand the concept of committing the defender by running towards the cones, faking to go one way and going another, leaving the defender behind.

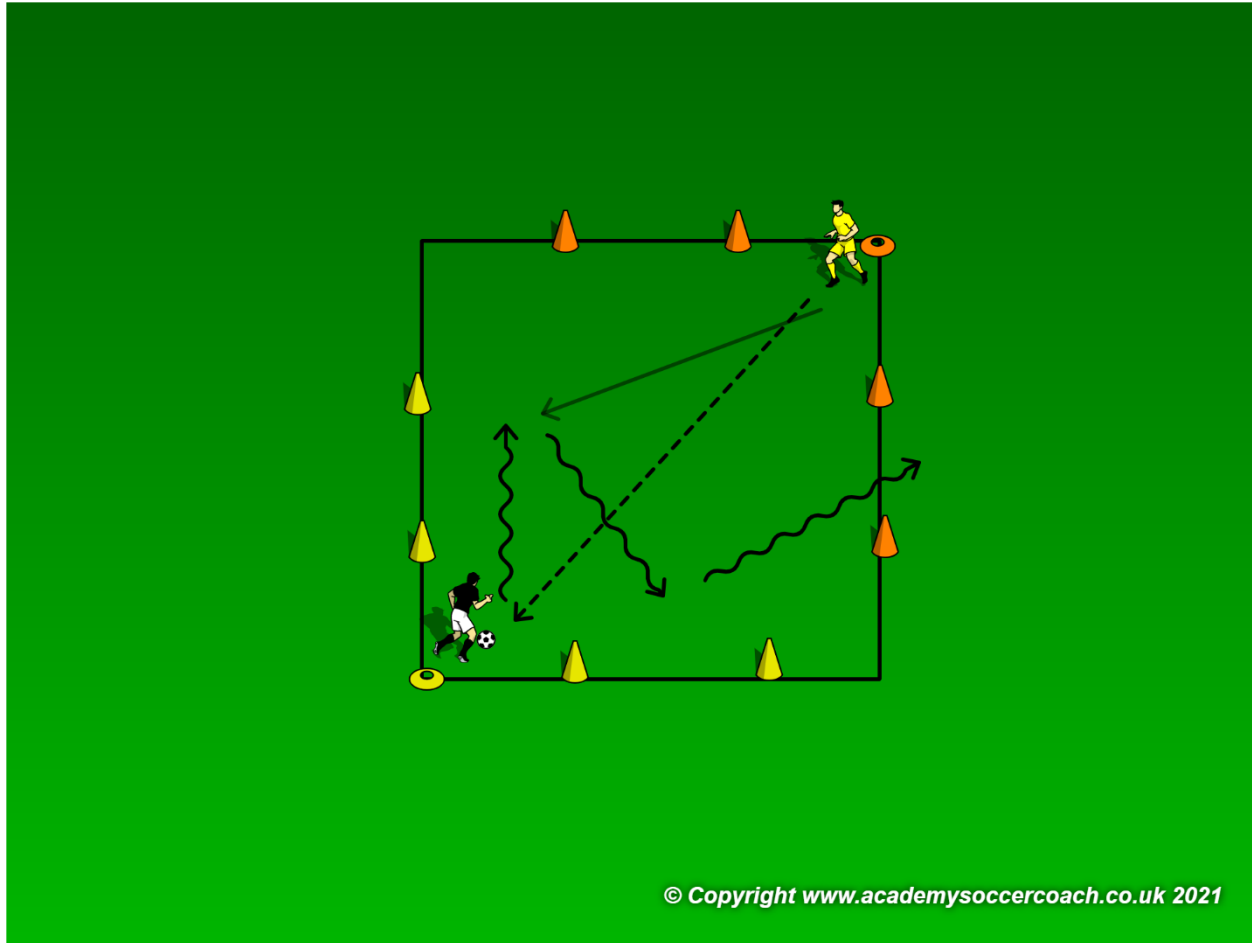


Progressions

- With a ball
- Take the fence away

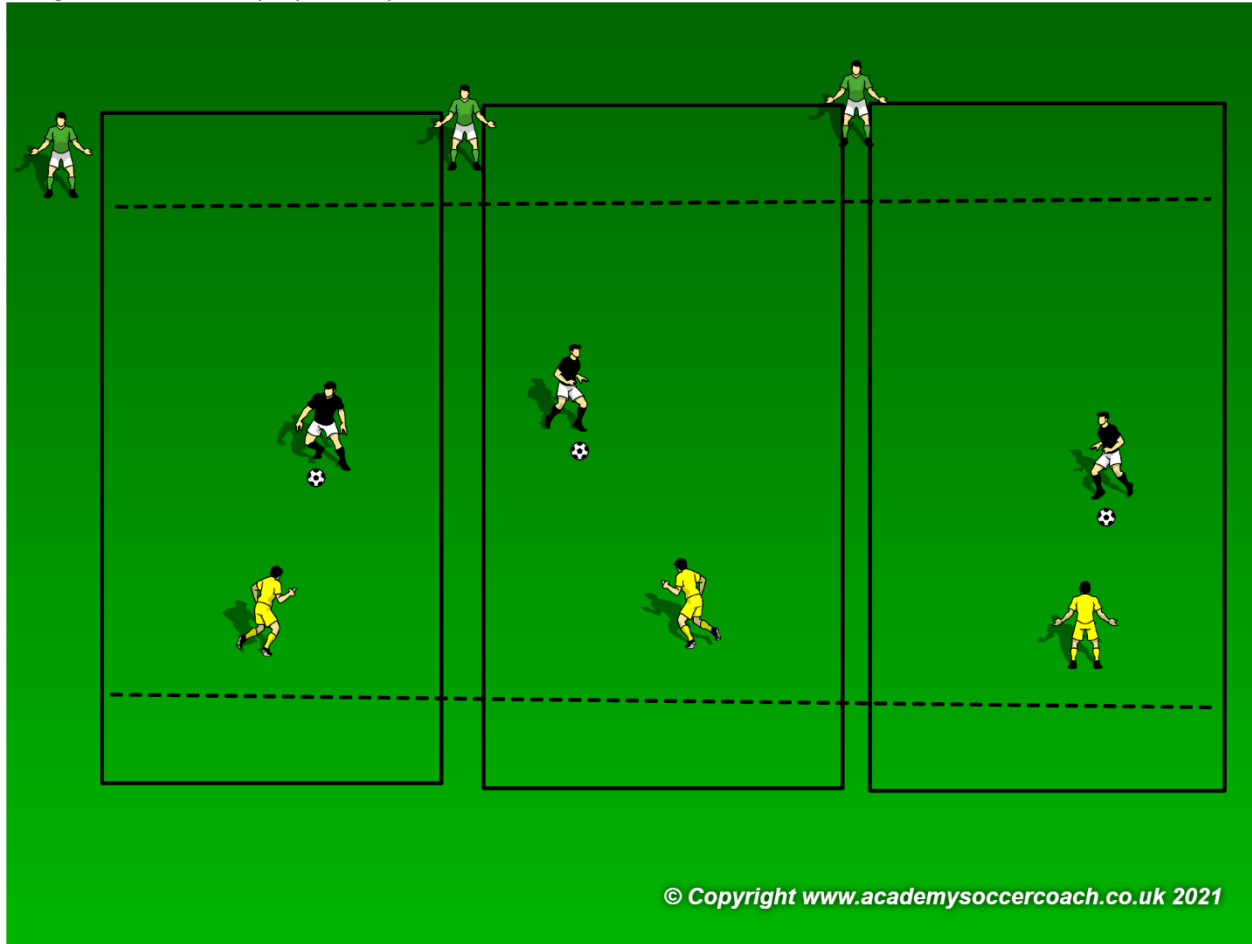
Activity 2

Use the same square as before but now have the players on opposite corners of the square and set up four gates on the square lines. Two gates are for player (A) to dribble through, and another two gates are for player (B) who starts defending to dribble through if wins the ball. Game starts after (B) passes the ball to (A). A lot of dribbling skills and special moves demanded!



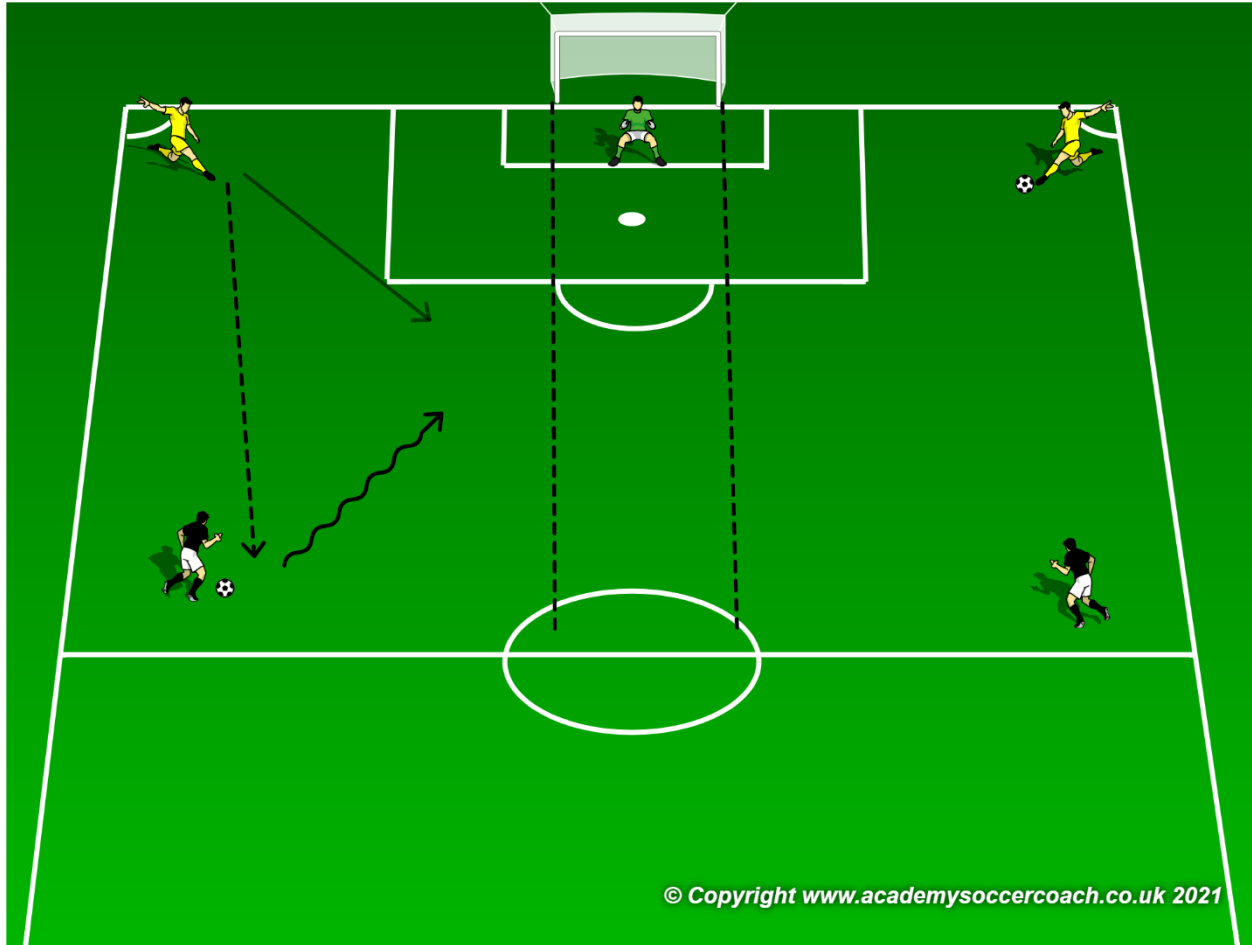
Activity 3

This is one of the most successful 1v1 activities I've worked with. This one is called "Divisions touchdown". Set up a bunch of 1v1 grids with end lines and scoring zones such as the American football ones, and each grid is going to be a division. The goal is to beat the opponent by dribbling the ball into the scoring zone and fully controlling the ball once you get there (1 point). Have a minimum of three players per division so the winner of each round stays in field to face the next opponent. After 5 minutes the player with most points gets promoted to another division and the player with less points gets relegated. The other players stay at their current division for "the next season".



Activity 4

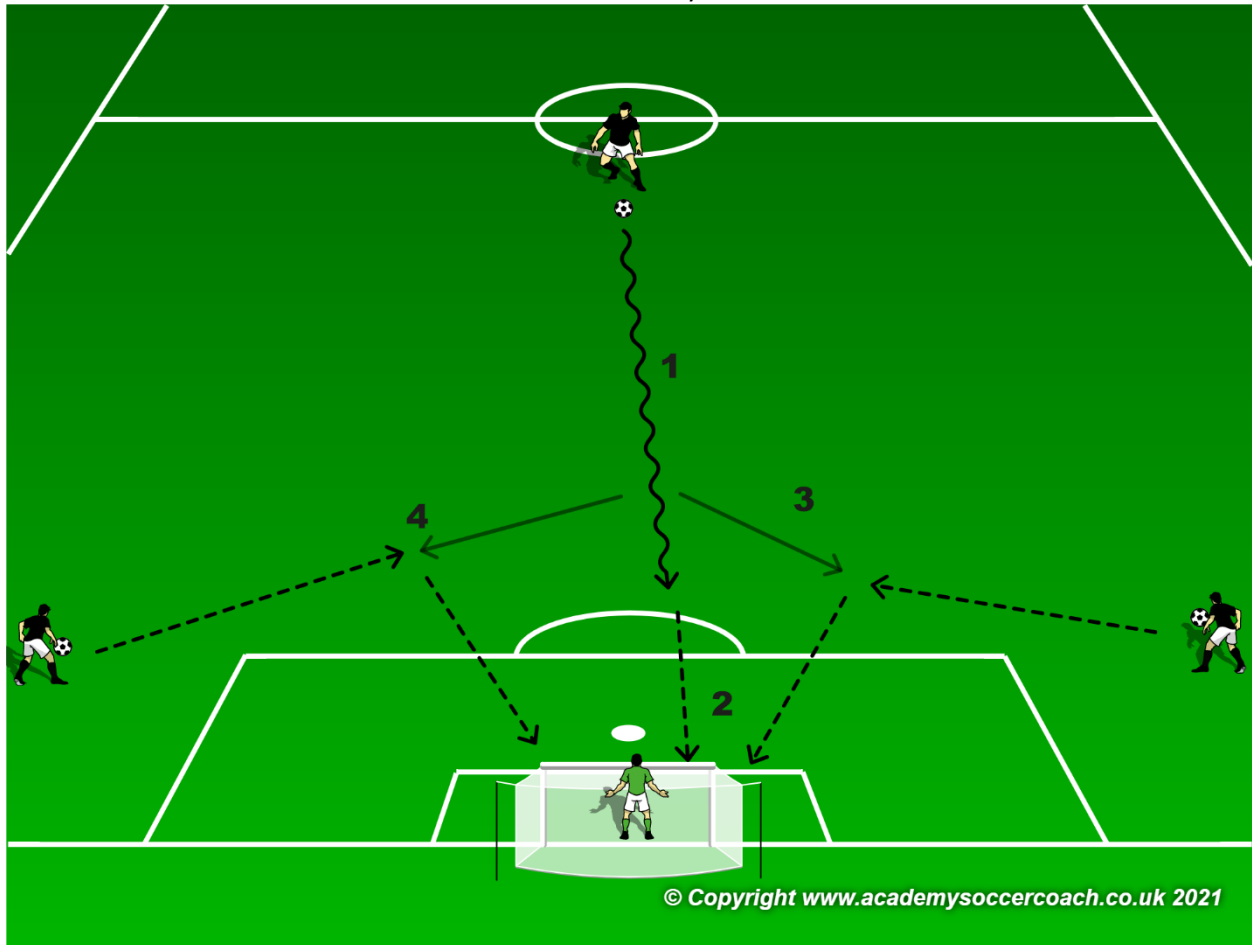
We now finally get to take shots! Split the attacking half or third in two sides. This 1v1 situation starts when player (B) passes the ball to (A) who will try to score on the goal as (B) will defend the goal. If (B) wins the ball, they must dribble past the end line or pass it to the coach who will be positioned in the middle of the two sides. Rotate after every play to have players work both on defense and attack.



Session 3 - Shooting practice – 2v1s and throw-ins on attacking third

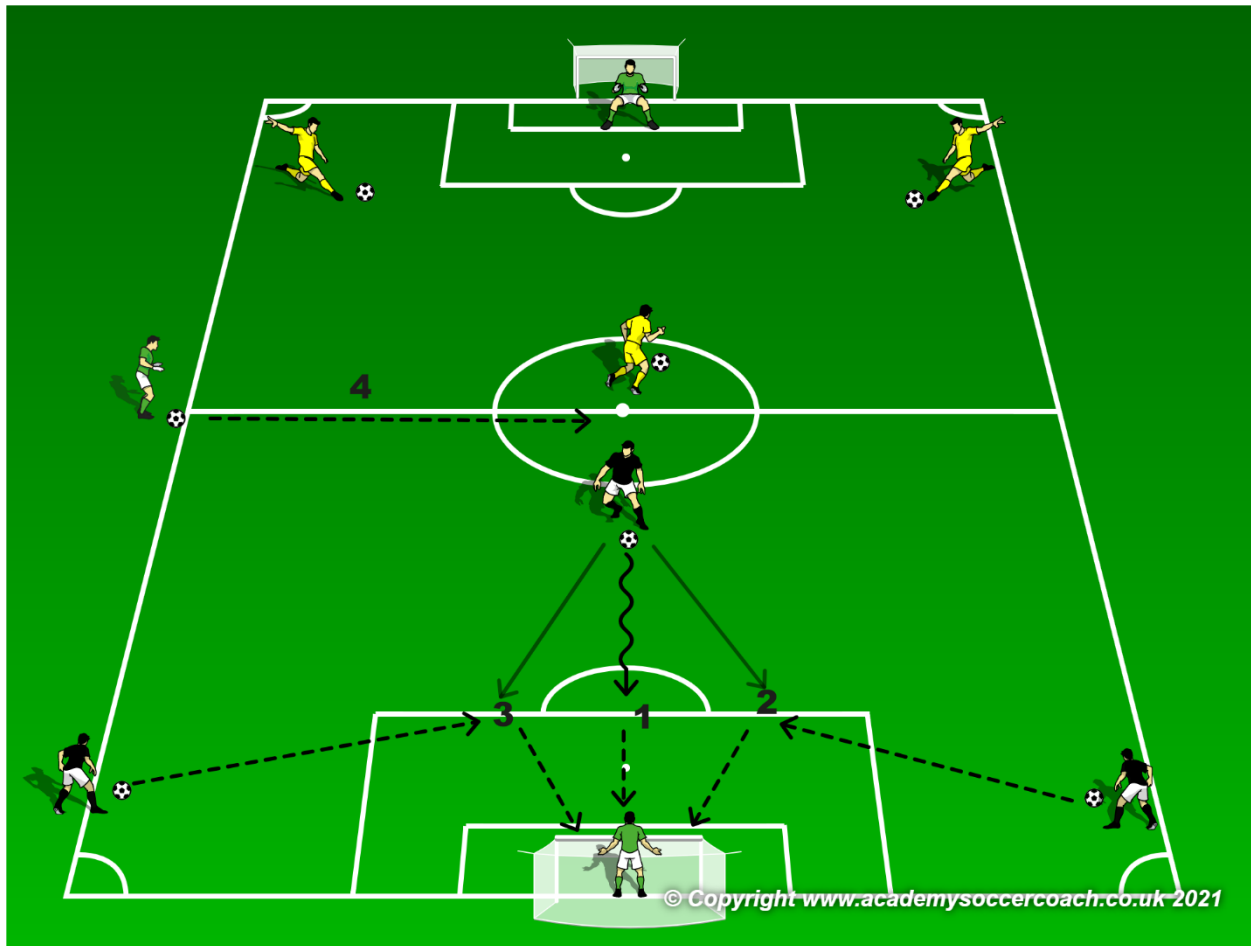
Warm up – Activity 1

Important to give everyone the chance to shoot on goal without a direct opposition except from the GK, to give them successful repetitions and confidence to confront opponents later on. In this first activity the players will perform a 1vGK, dribbling the ball as much as they want from a distance to the goal and finishing it. At second they receive a pass from the right, shooting the ball on one touch with their right foot, followed by a pass from the left to shoot on one touch with their left foot. This pattern progresses to a throw-in from each side to work on header and volleys later on.



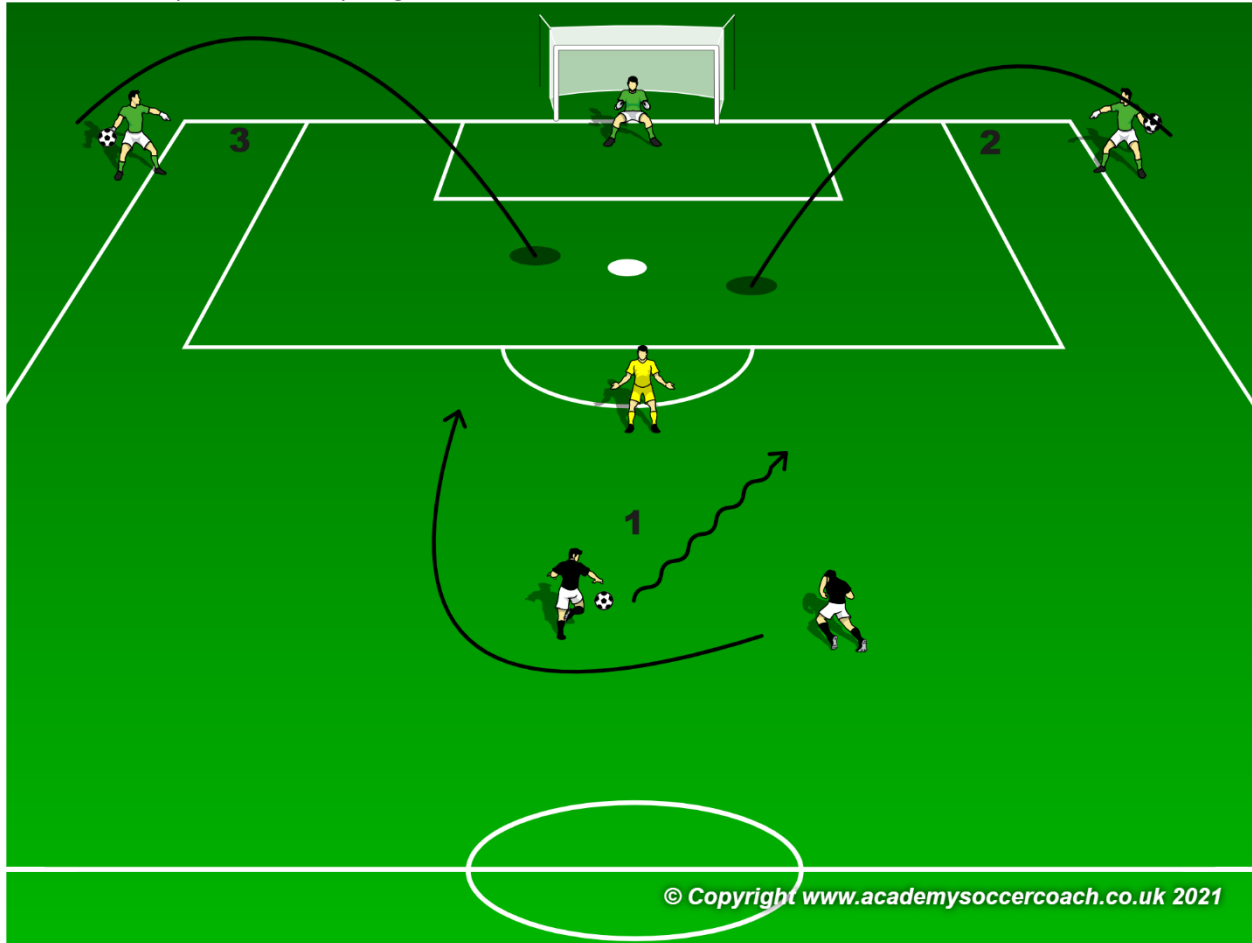
Activity 2

Progressing from activity 1, players will now repeat the unopposed pattern on both sides of the field. After all three shots/headers, the coach will serve a ball in to have the player from each side play a 1v1 to score.



Activity 3

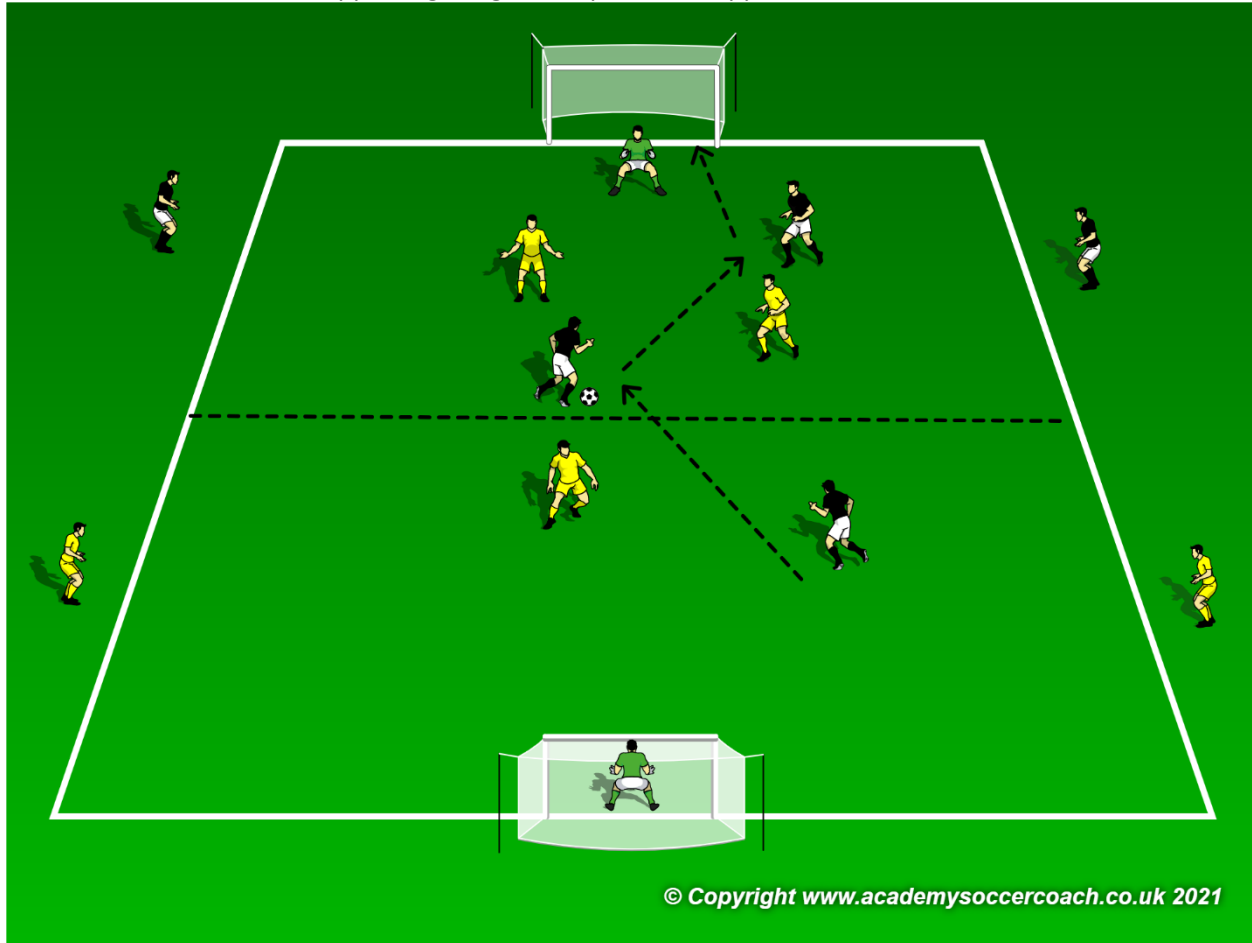
In this last activity, we are also going to work on defensive headers. The coach will throw a high ball towards the defender, so they head it away. After that, starts a 2v1. Important to encourage bold and smart moves as well as playing directly towards the goal. When this play is over, a throw-in comes from the right and one of the attackers must deceive the defender the other one gets open and score. Another throw-in comes from the other side at the end of the 1st throw-in play. Rotate the players to make them experience every single situation.



Session 4 – Width and depth to break compact defenses

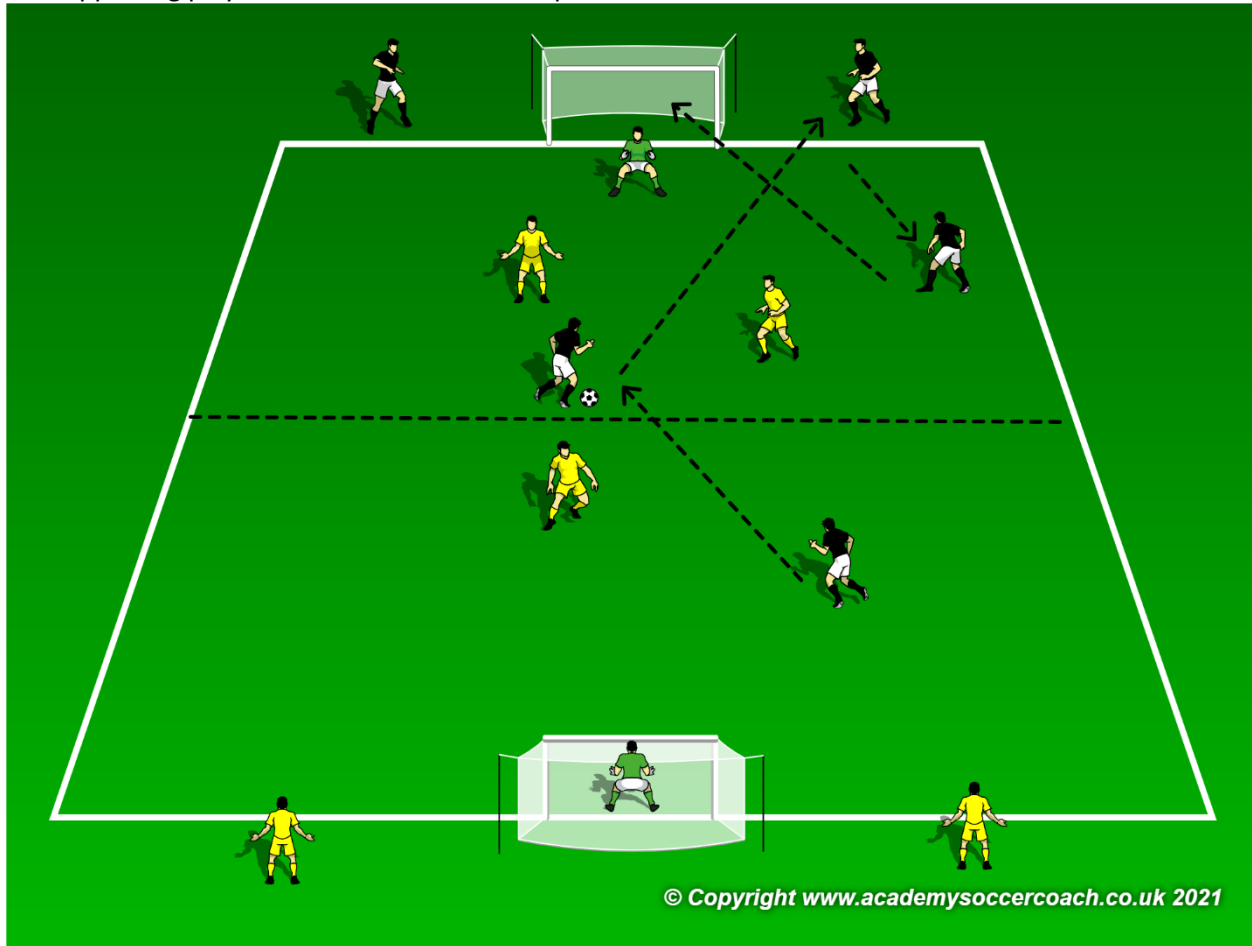
Activity 1

On this Small-sided game, twelve players are going to be split into GK+3 v 3+GK having two support players on the attacking half's width for each team. The goal here is to take advantage of an attacking overload of 5v3 with two supporting wingers to spread the opposition.



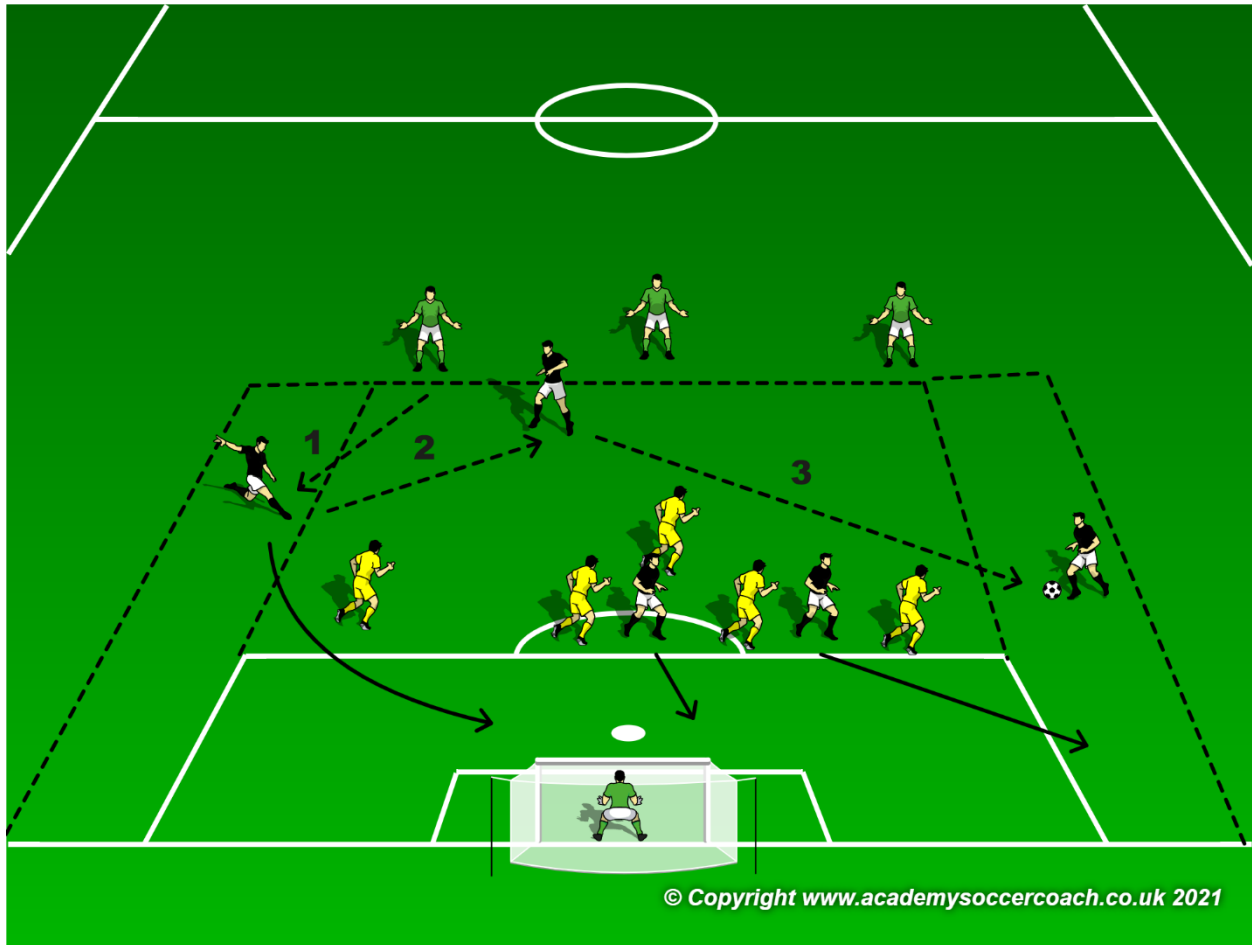
Activity 2

In a progression of Activity 1, the only change here is that the support players are now on depth, each on one side of opponent's goal. The goal here is to have your team connect the ball with the supporting players on depth to score. A goal scored is worth one point, but a goal scored after a connection with the supporting players is made is worth three points.



Activity 3

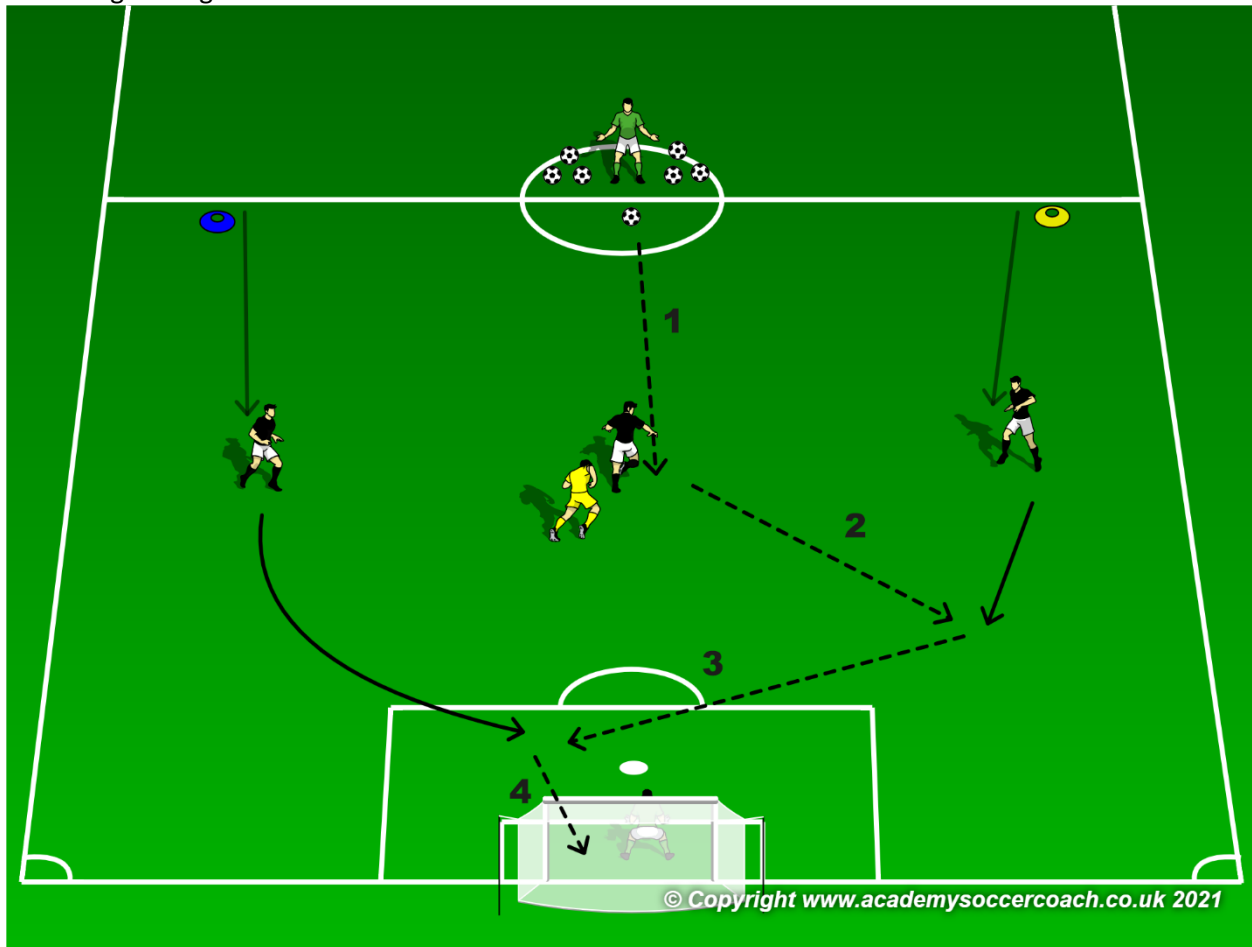
On this small-sided game, you will split the players into a 5(+3) v 5+GK. The defending team will be instructed to play on a G-4-1 compact formation with zonal references. The attacking team is instructed to have two wide players in the corridors where defenders are not allowed in, one central player near the edge of the game space, and two strikers. The three neutral players are positioned in the edge of the game space opposed from the goal line. The attacking team play to score in the goal and the defending team when in possession needs to complete a pass to one of the three neutral players to transition to attack.



Session 5 - Make space to everyone else with a false 9

Activity 1

Coach is positioned with the balls in the center circle. One attacker on each side of him, a striker at about 20 yards from him followed by a defender. This 3v1 starts when the striker (a.k.a false 9 in this case) makes a run towards the coach calling for the ball and followed by an opponent. As soon as this happens, the two wingers by the coach's side make a run. The goal here is to take advantage of the space created behind the opponent's back because of the false 9's run to play forward and score. In the example, the false 9 quickly does the wall pass to the left winger who then crosses into the box for the right winger to score. Beautiful!



Activity 3

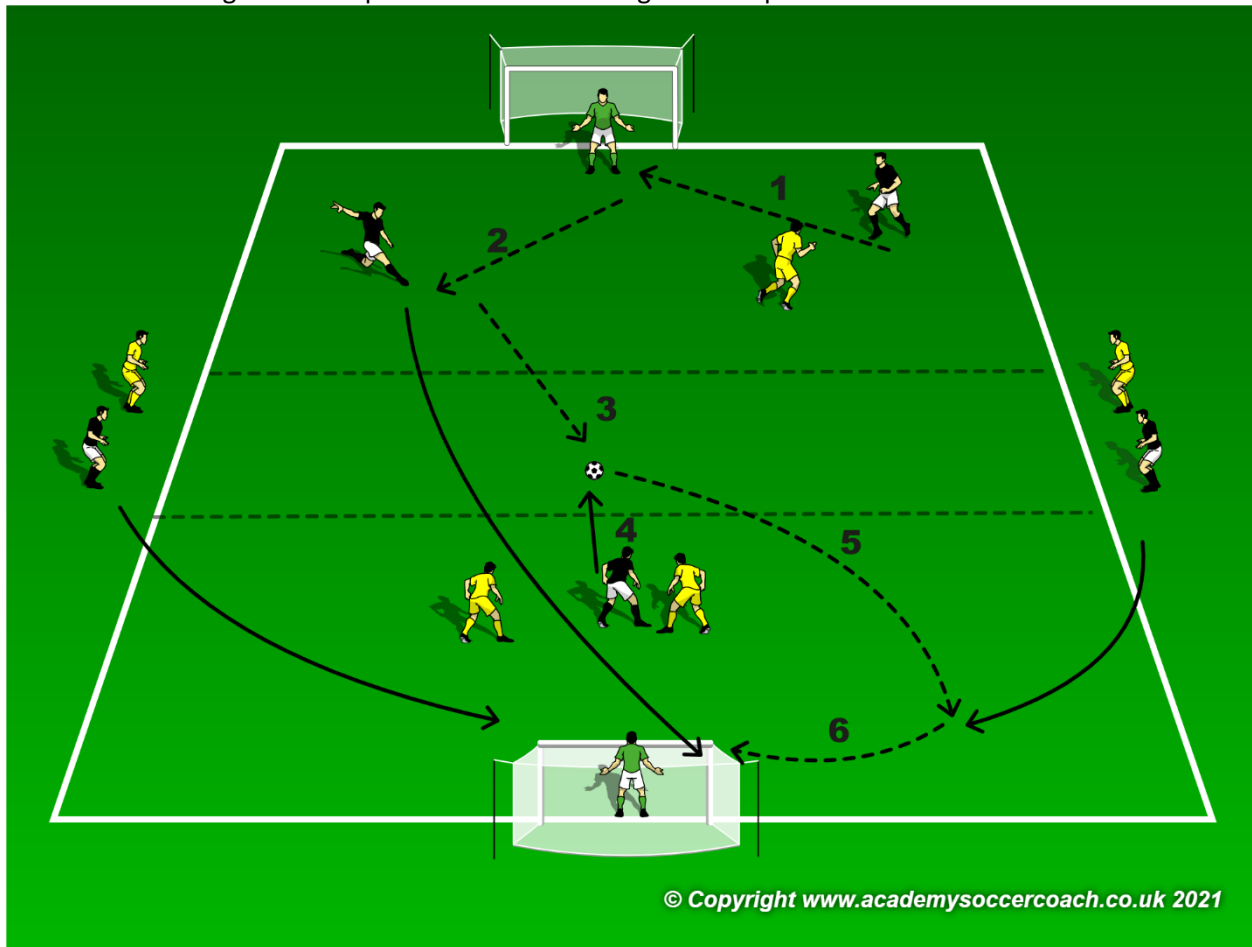
This small-sided game is played in a G+5 v 5+G structure and the field is split into two attacking/defending zones and a middle zone. The teams are divided in two players on defensive zone, one player on attacking and two other players on the sidelines of the middle zone. The goal is to build from the defensive zone, have the forward getting in the middle zone on the right time to release the wingers and one player from the defensive zone to join in attack as shown in the diagram below.

Rules: Goal scored = 2 points

Successful false 9 play but no goal = 1 point

Wingers' goal = 3 points

Defender's goal from a penetration in attacking zone = 5 points

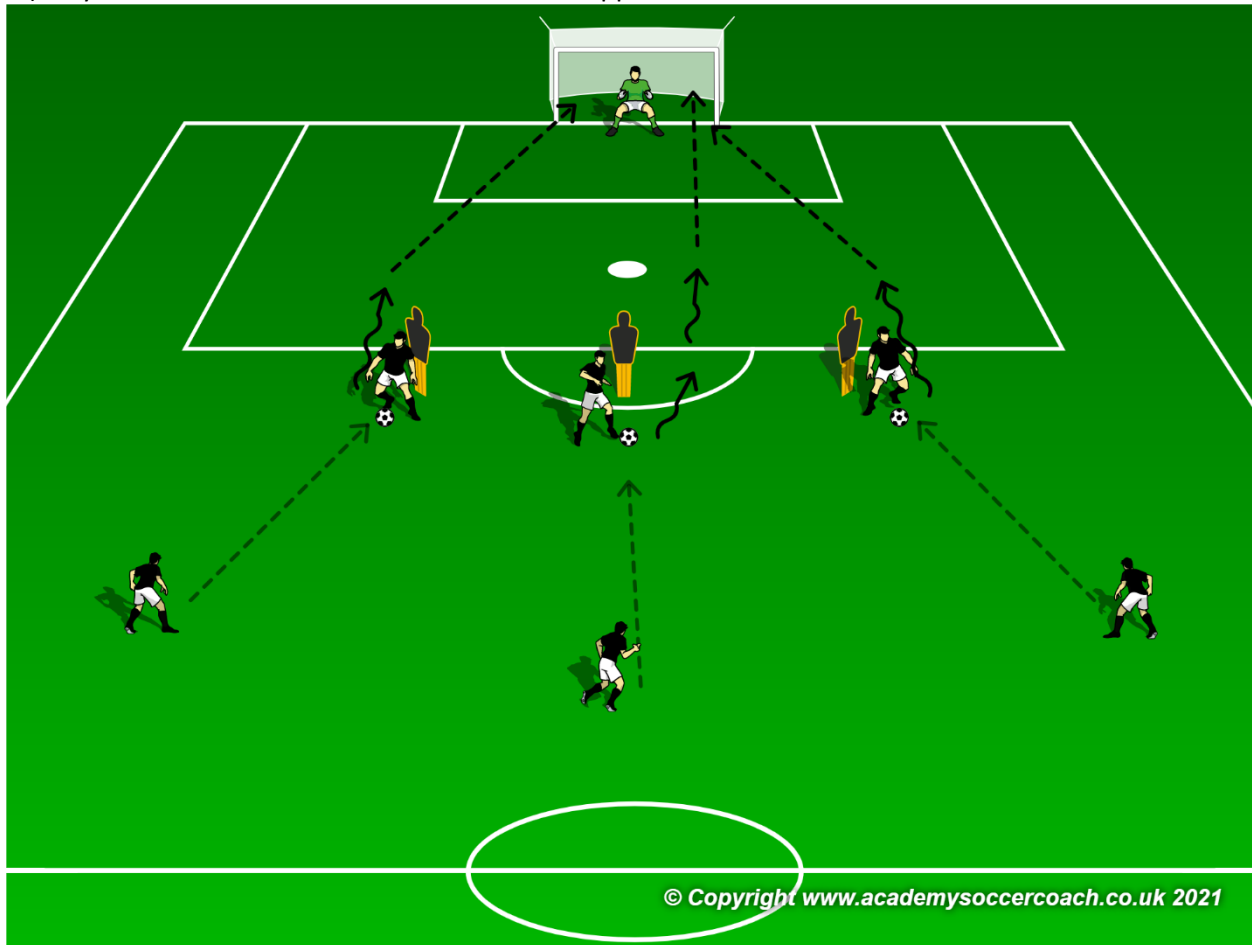


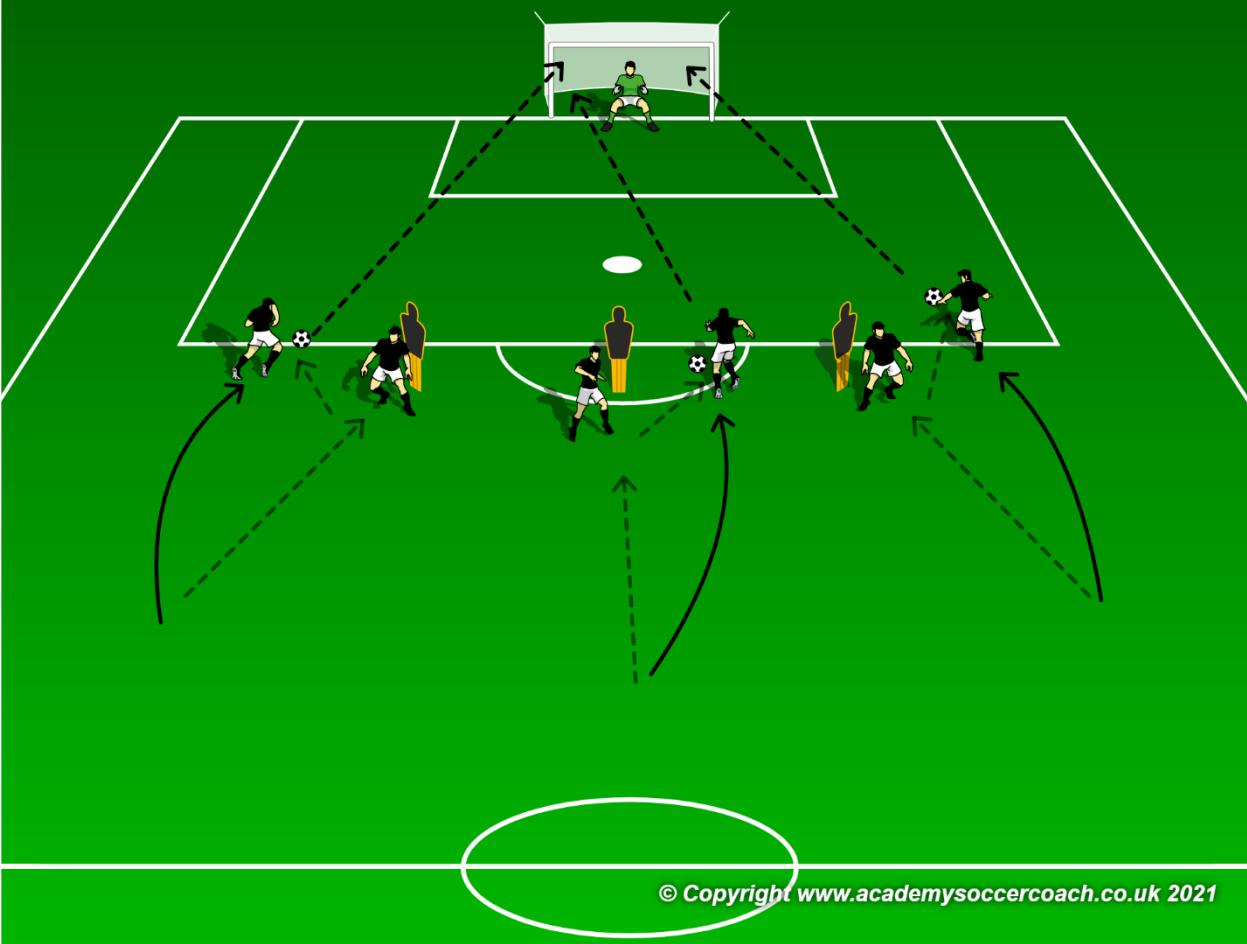
Session 6 – Playing with your back to the opponents’ defense

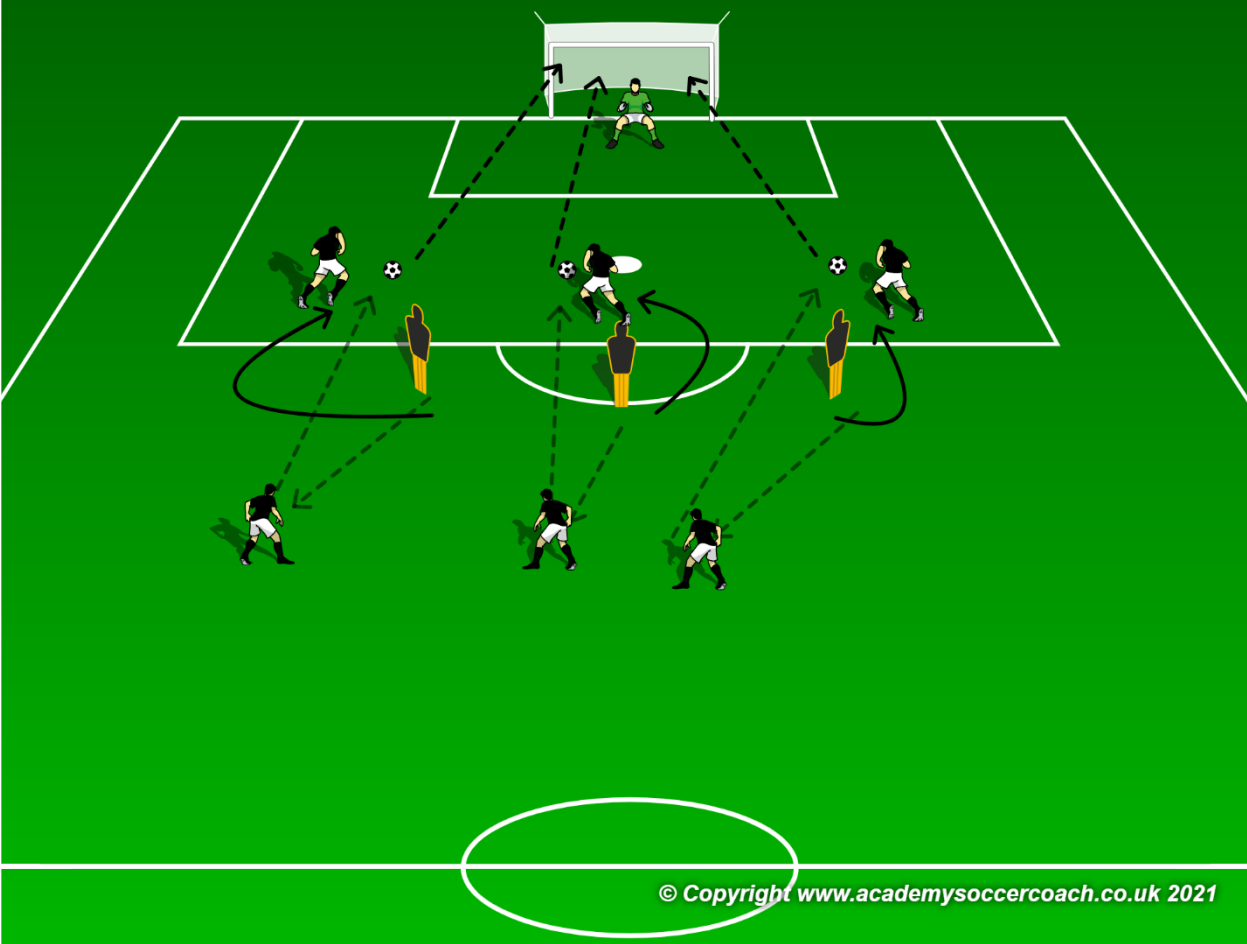
Activity 1

Use a simple drill to start with increasing the confidence of your players by taking shots unopposed. Here I propose some patterns of playing with the goal behind the striker:

- 1-) Receive and turn to score by yourself
- 2-) Receive and serve your teammate
- 3-) Play a 1-2 combination to receive behind the opponent’s back

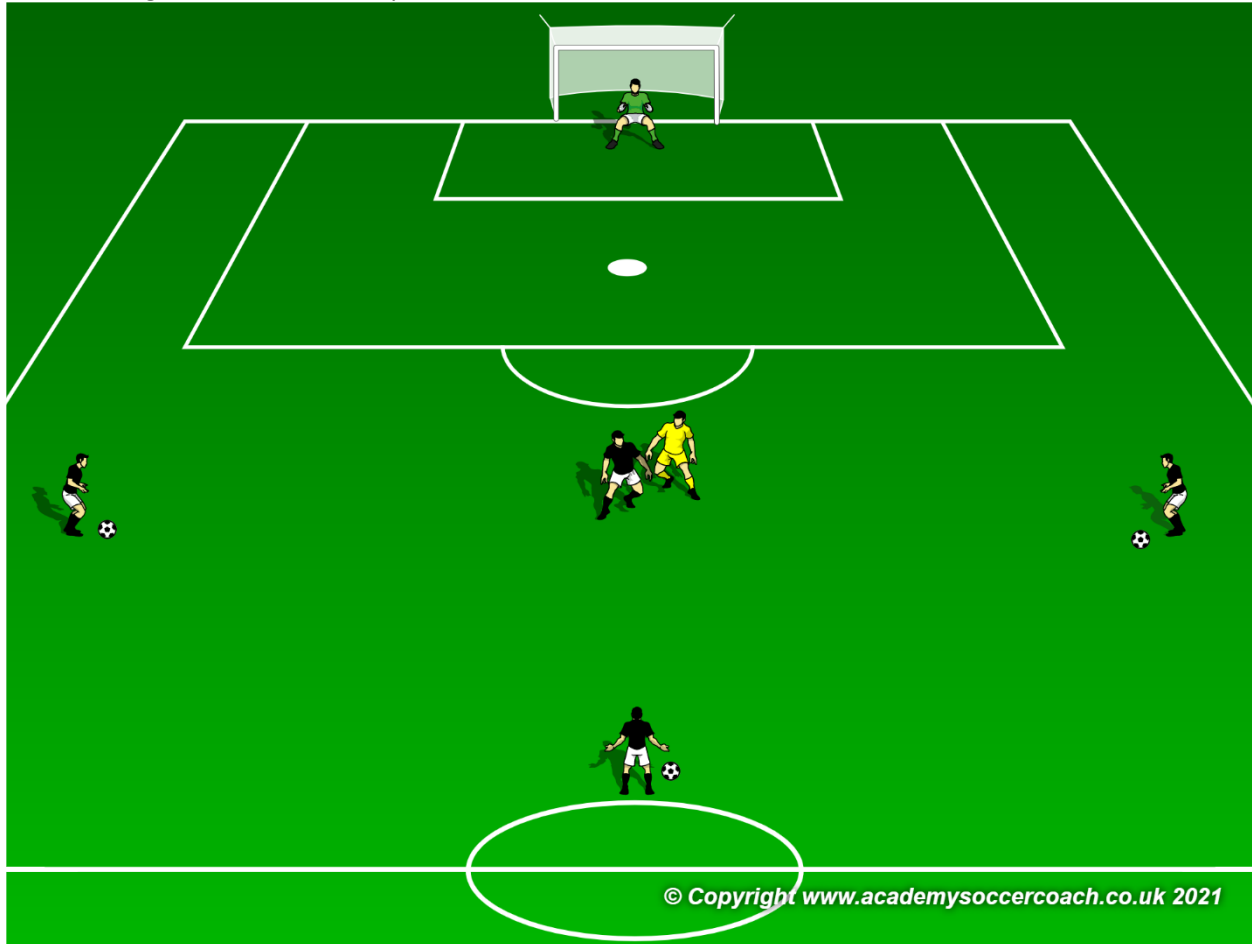






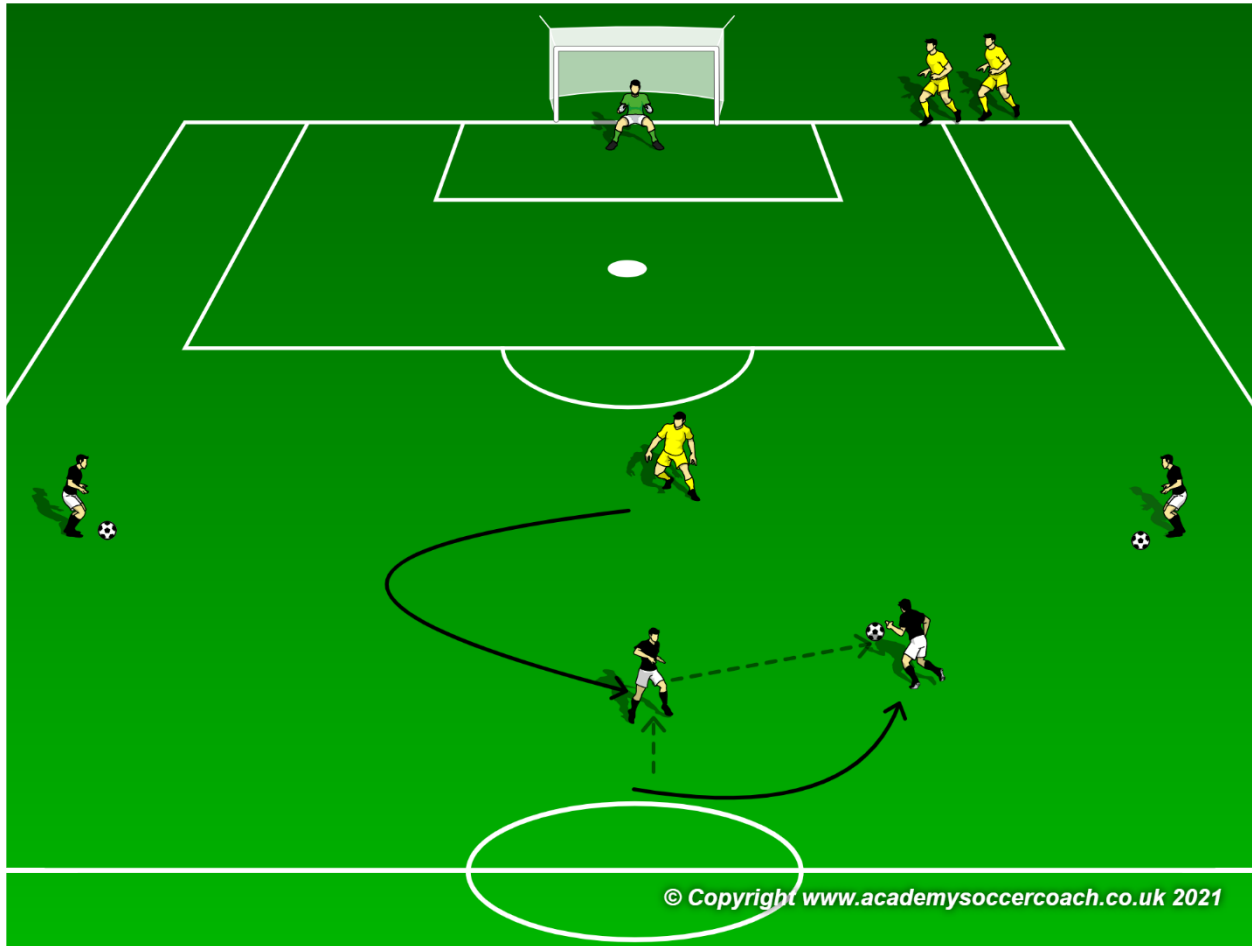
Activity 2

On this 1v1, the attacker tries to lose the marker to receive from one of the three players positioned on the wings and in the middle as shown in the diagram below. The three servers can only pass the ball when the attacker calls it. It is up to the attacker to trick the opponent by faking to go one way and quickly shifting to another. When the decision is made and the ball is received, 1v1 to score on goal. You can do one ball only per round then rotate to begin with and then progress to two balls per round, and finishing with all three balls per round.



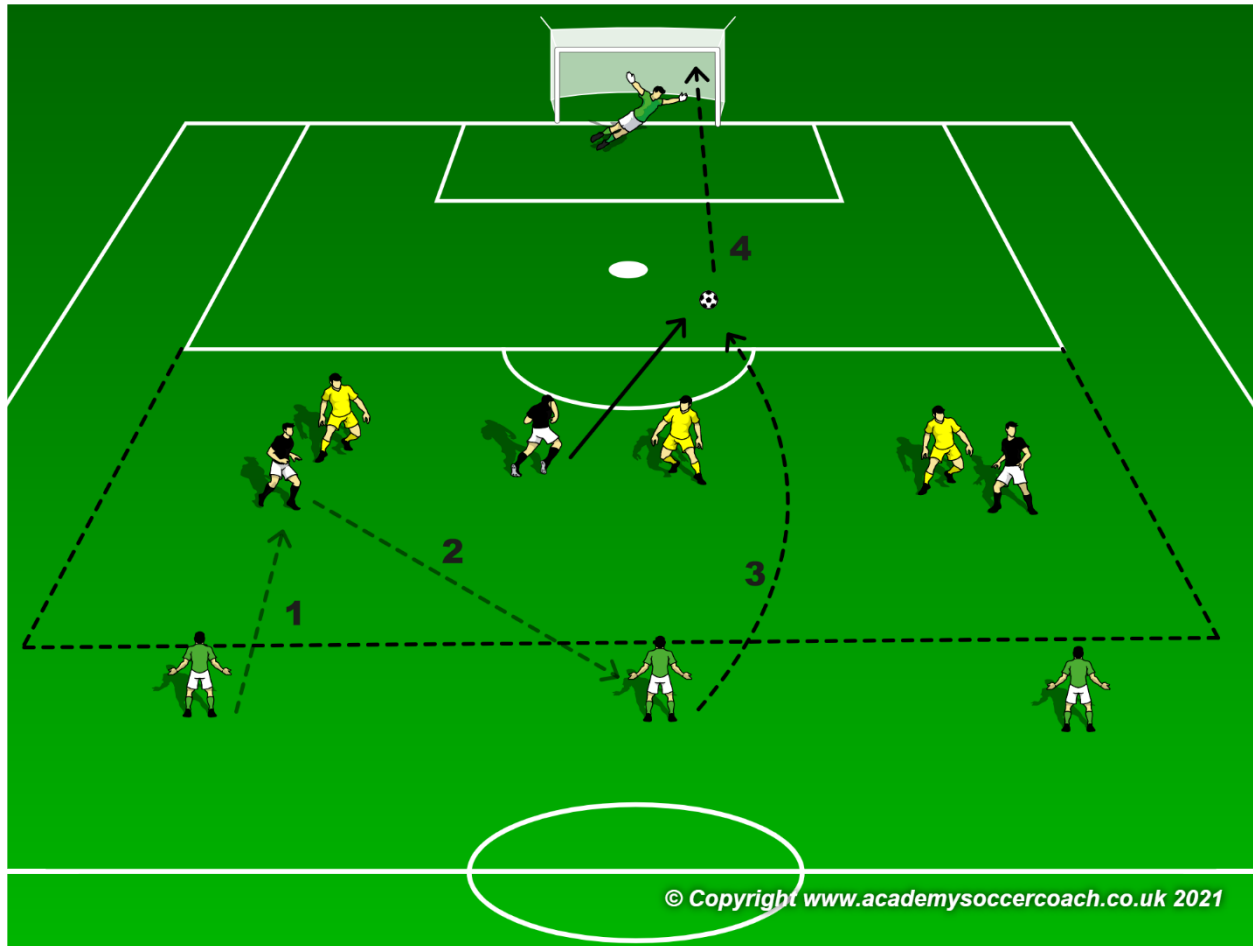
Activity 3

As a progression on the complexity from activity 2, on activity 3 the chosen server joins in the play, making attack play on a 2v1. Then keep on progressing to a 3v2 (a second defender joins in) and end with a 4v3 (a third defender joins in).



Activity 4

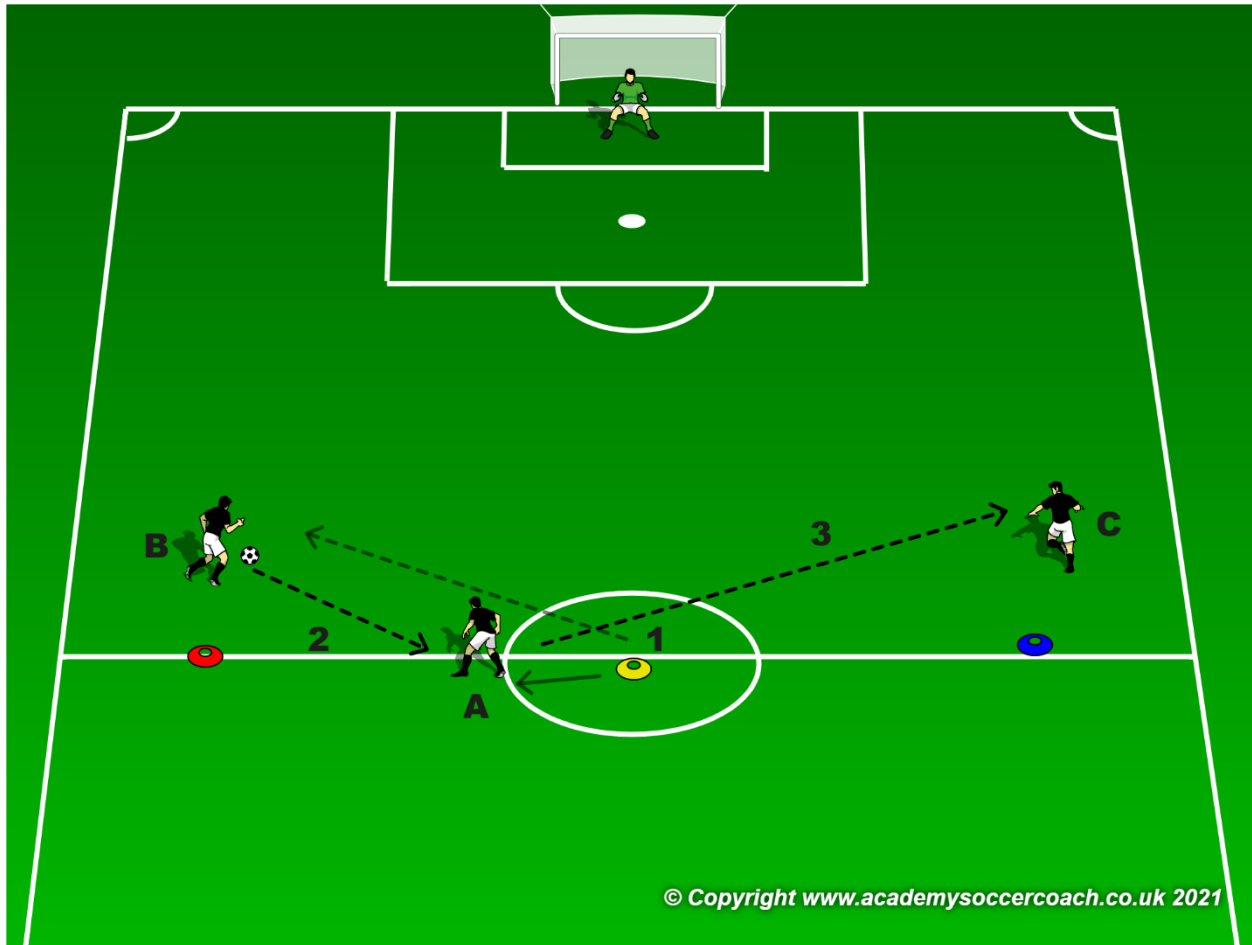
Played in a 3v3+3, this game is amazing on developing the players ability to work with their back to opponents' goal. Use the area of two times the GK box as shown in the diagram below. Have three neutral players on the edge at the opposite line from the goal line. The attacking team works with the neutrals to build the play and score. The defending team works to stop the attack from scoring and when win possession pass the ball to one of the neutrals to transition to attack.

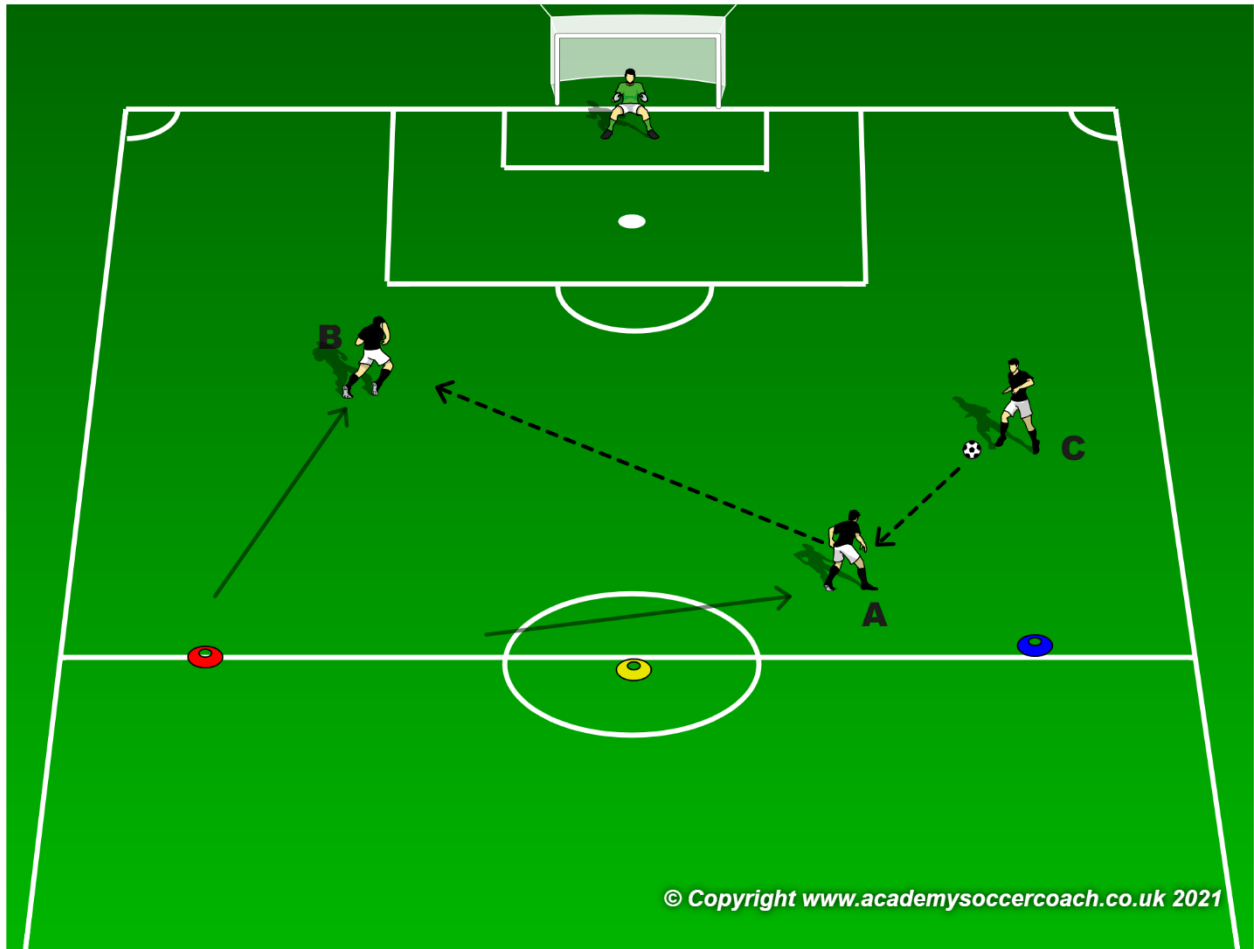


Session 7 – Switching points of attack

Activity 1

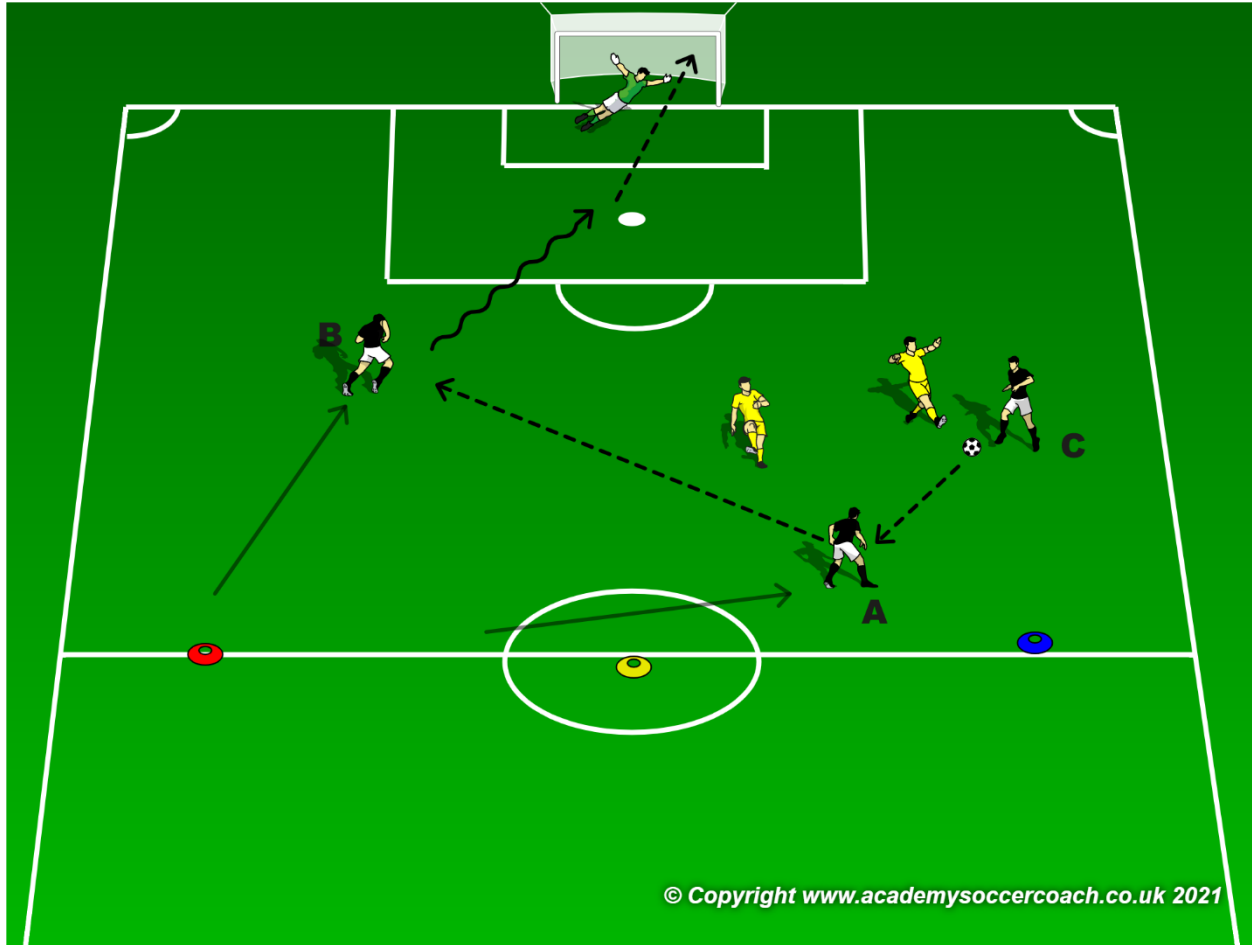
On the following activity players are going to work in threes. Ball starts with (A) in the middle who is going to distribute the ball to the wingers (B) and (C) as they progress up the field in the pattern shown in the diagram. Once they get close enough to the goal they will attempt to score. Use your creativity and set some more patterns in this same shape with overlaps, long balls and other combinations.





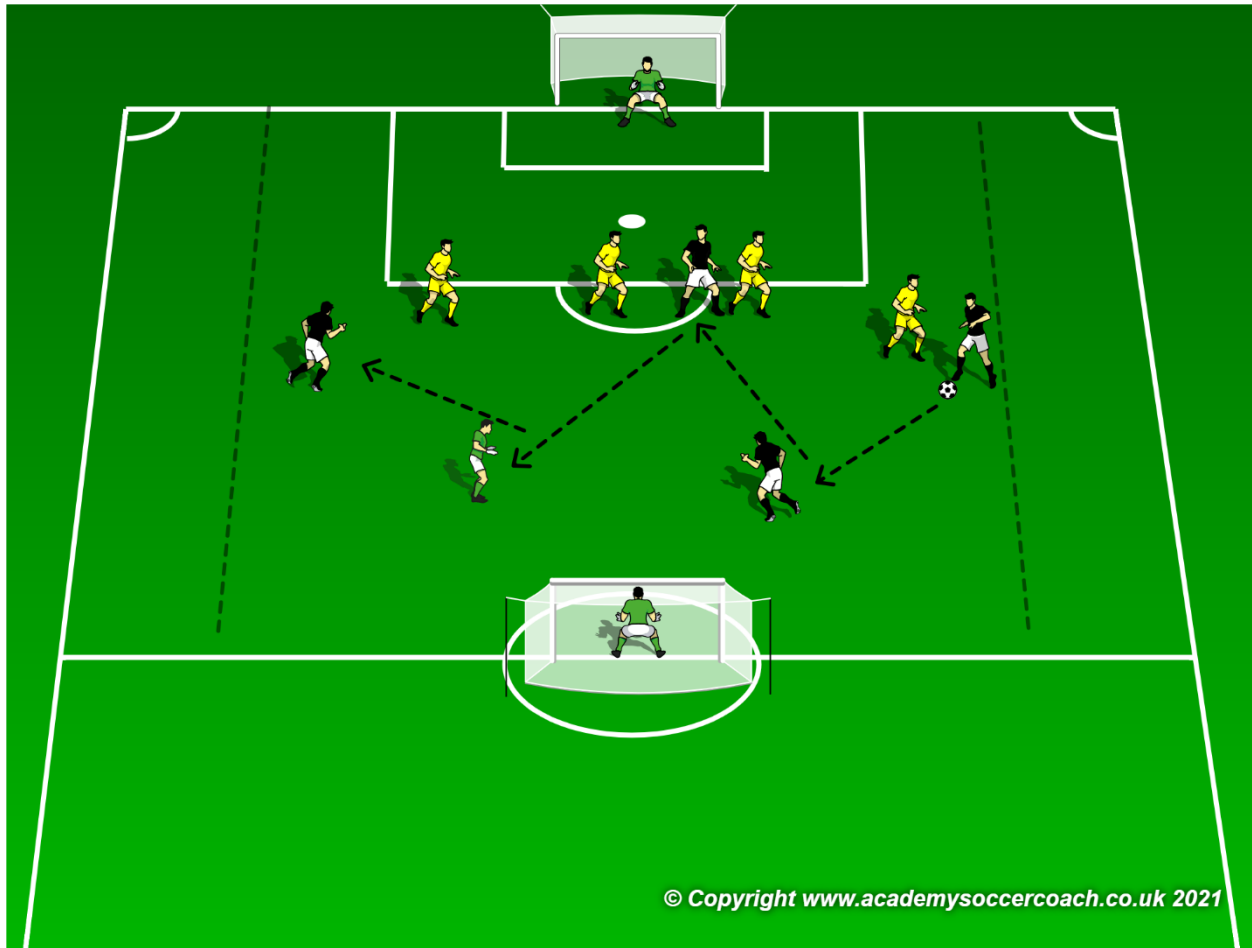
Activity 2

Progressing from activity 1, add a defender to make it a 3v1. If your group is advanced, add two defenders already to make it a 3v2.



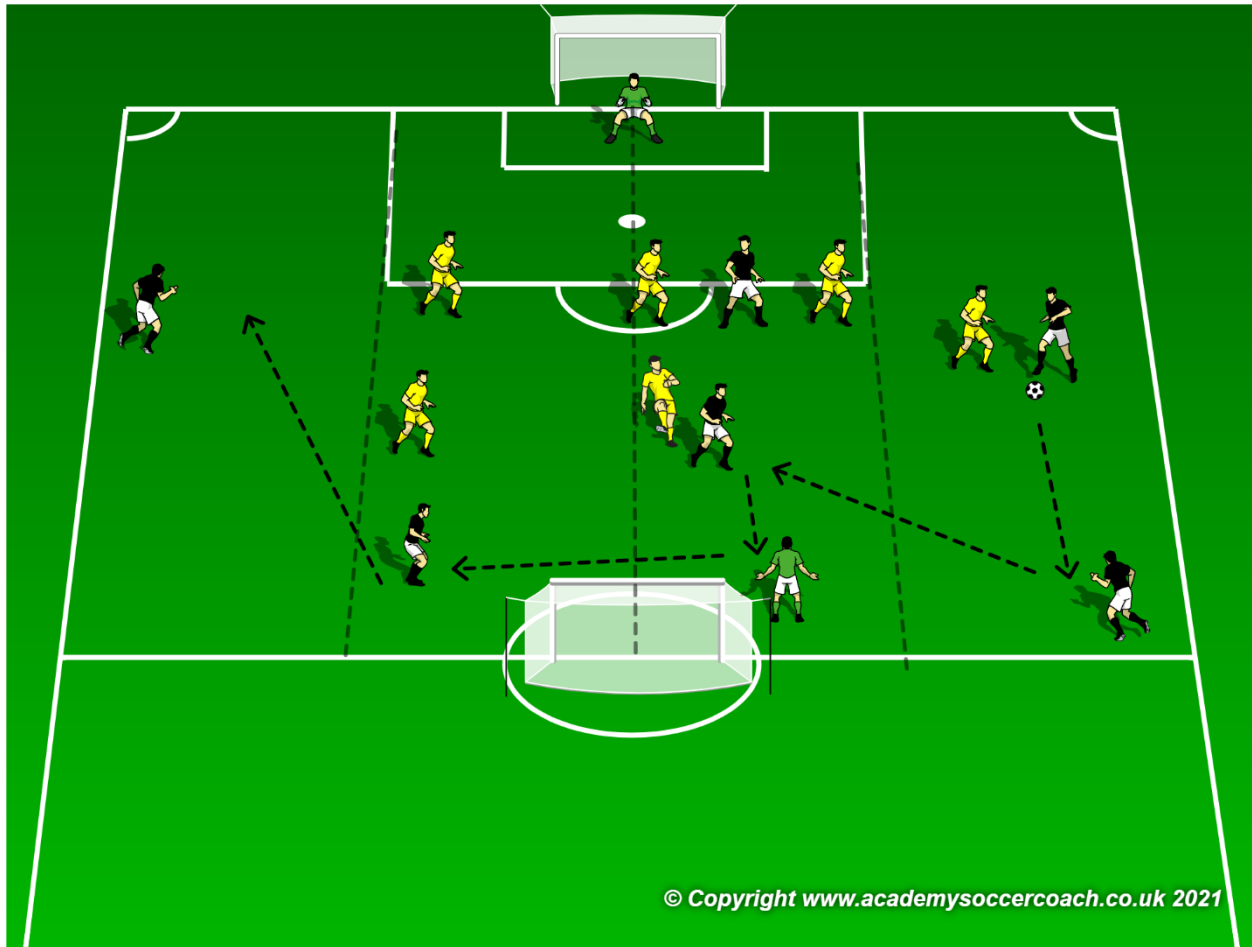
Activity 3

As the session flows, the activities get more and more complex and game realistic. On this one, playing in a 4v4+1 small-sided game structure, players are encouraged to move the ball as fast as possible to create gaps in the opponents' defense. The neutral player plays as a midfielder, helping to create an overload in order to make attacks happen with the chosen purpose. Teams are instructed to play a back 4 when defending, and a 2mids-2 wingers-1 striker when attacking.



Activity 4

On one half of the field, set four lanes and play a 7v7 with the following rule: when the team in possession manages to have the ball running through all four lanes, they get a point. If they score on the same play, the goal is worth an extra 4 points. A regular goal scored is worth 3 points. Teams are instructed to play a GK-2-1-3 when attacking and a GK-4-2 when defending.

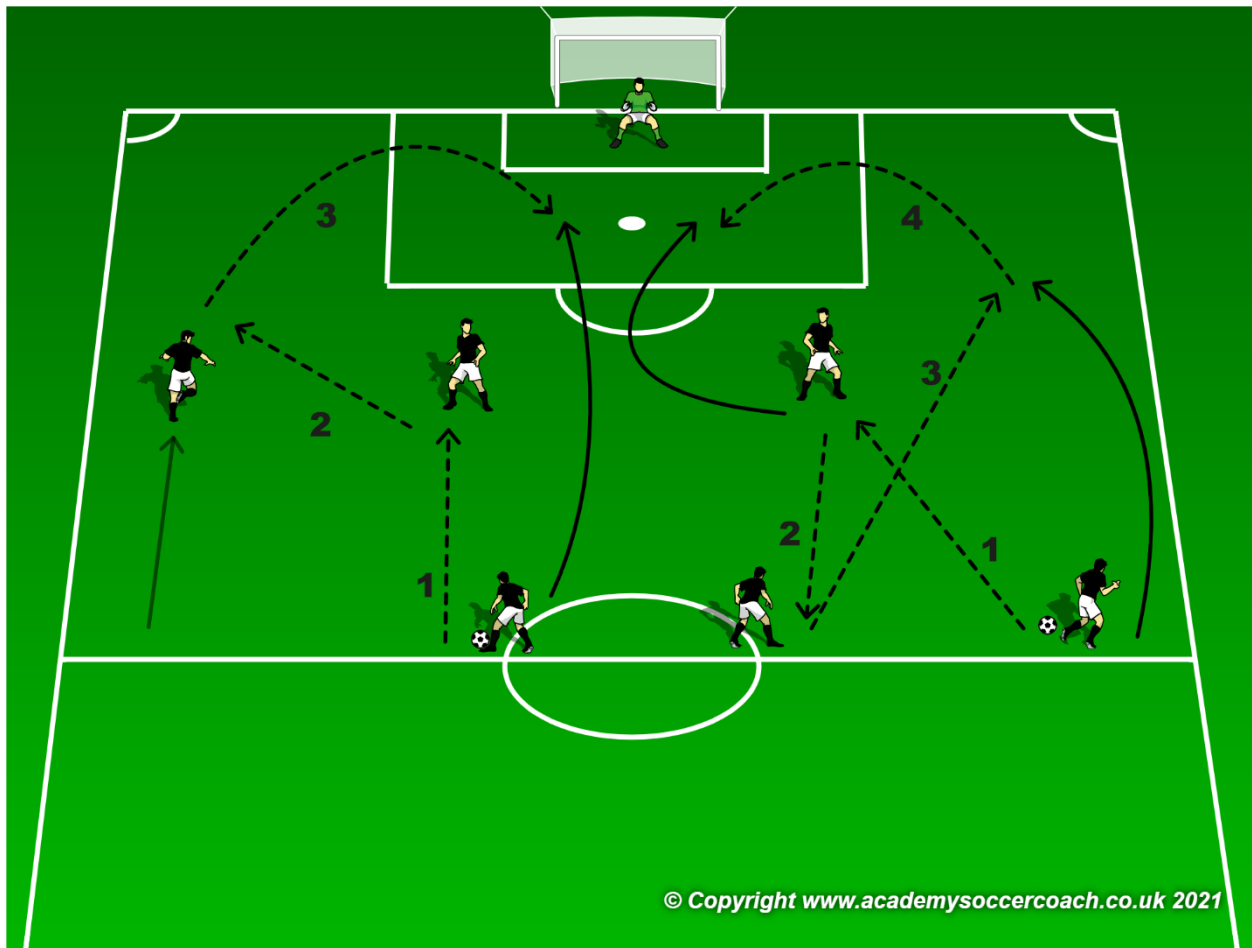


Session 8 – Overlaps to create opportunities

Activity 1

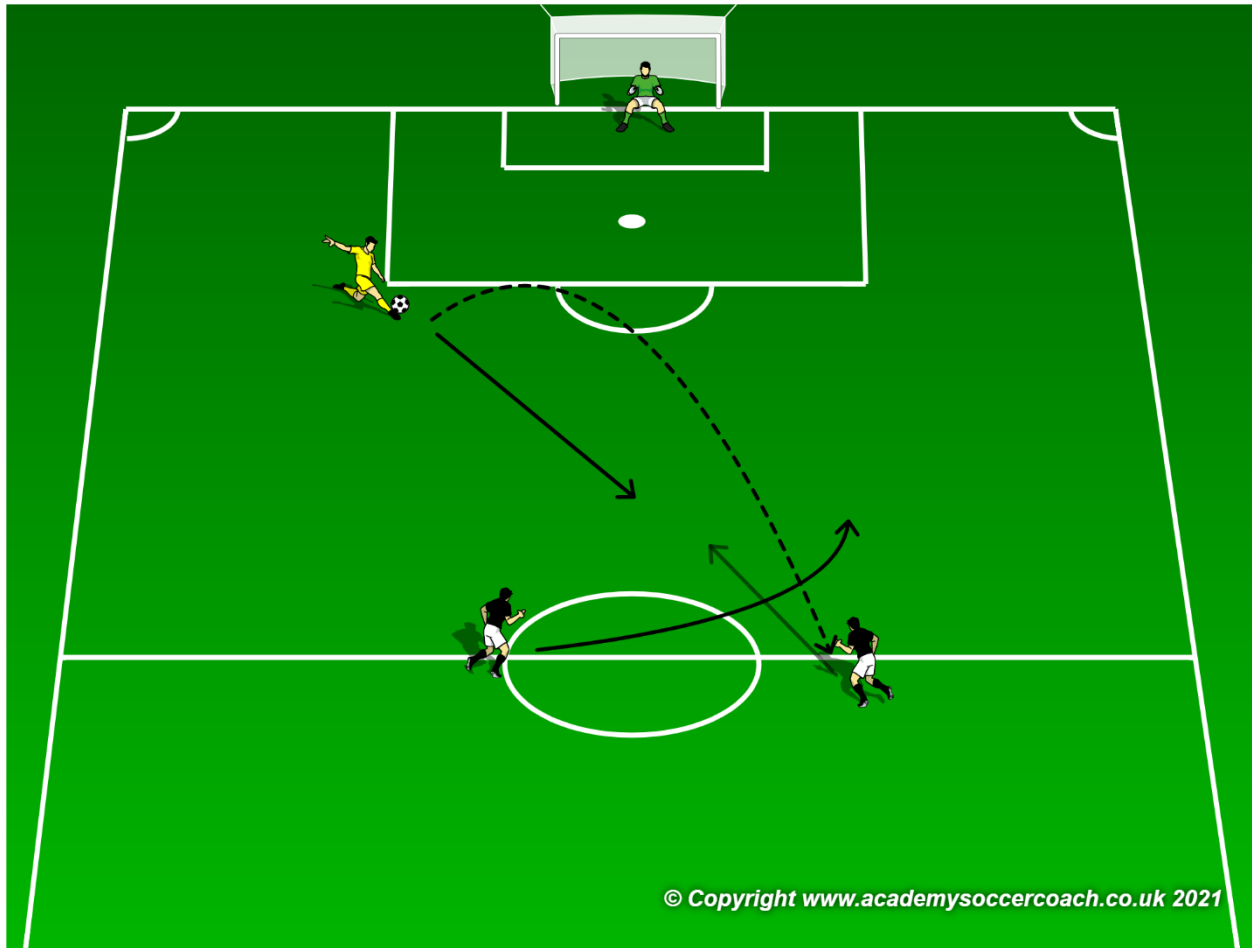
Warm up with some passing patterns and combinations to set some triggers for wide players to overlap. On the left the ball starts with the center midfielder who passes to the forward and sprints into the box. The forward will pass it on their first touch to the winger who is on the run. Cross in and finish by the CM.

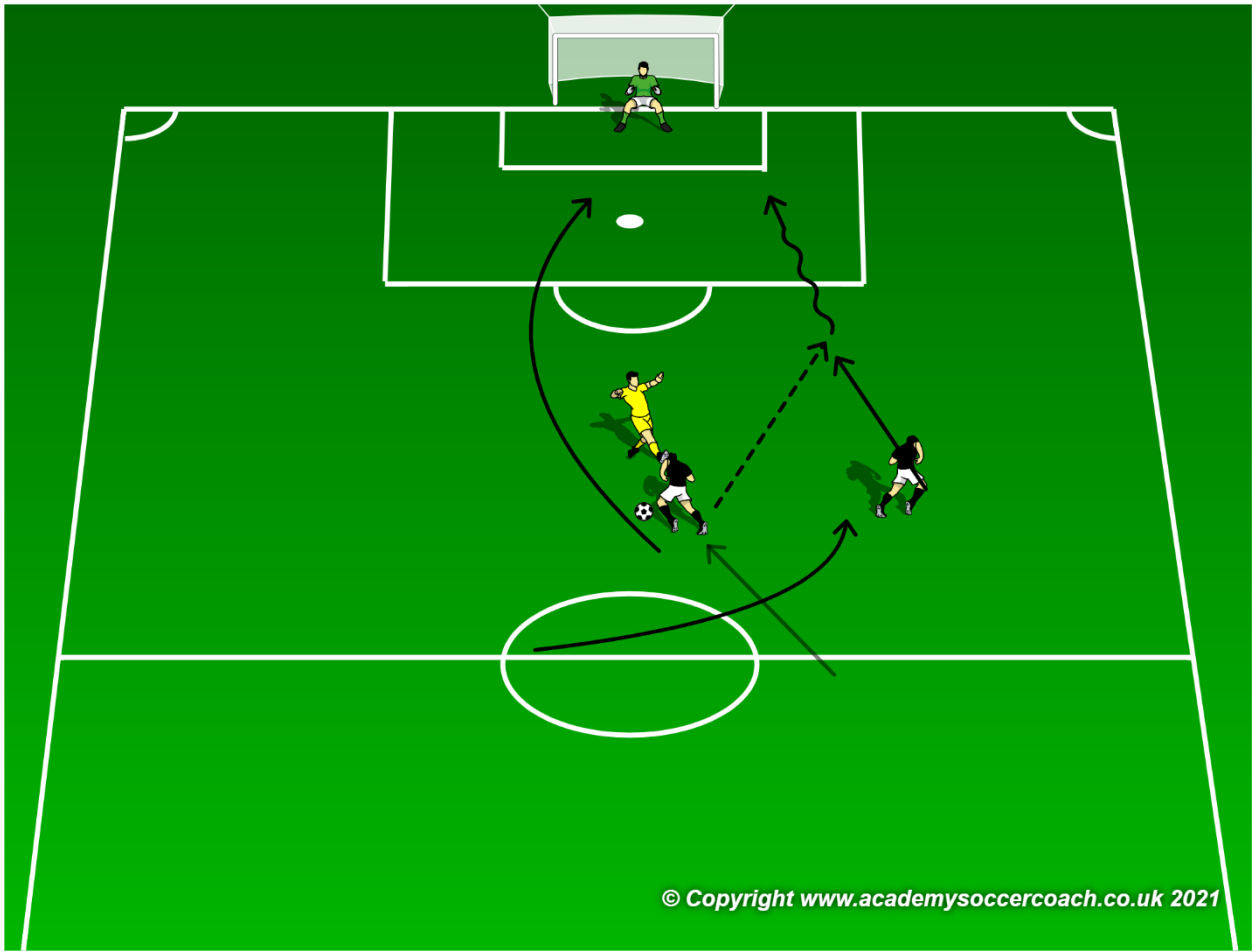
On the right the ball starts with the winger who will pass it to the striker and makes an overlapping run. The striker lays it off to the center mid and makes a curved run into the box. Cross in by the winger and finish by the forward.



Activity 2

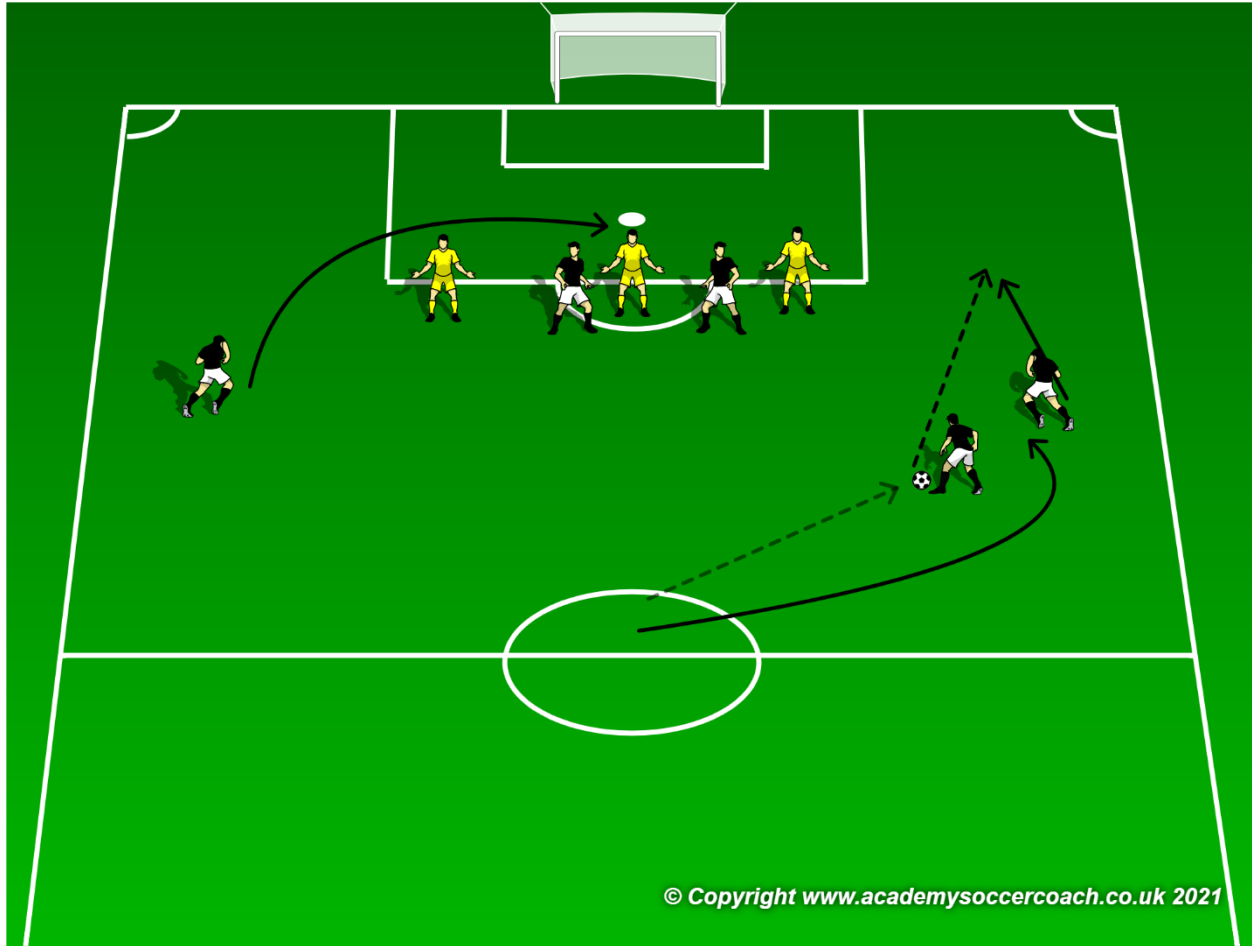
Play a 2v1 to get players to overlap in a more complex than the warm up situation but not yet in a high degree. The defender serves the ball to one of the attackers and close them down. The second attacker quickly sprints to overlap their teammate, leaving the defender no option but to make a decision of put pressure on the man on the ball or deny the pass, leaving the man on the ball time and space to dribble closer to their goal.





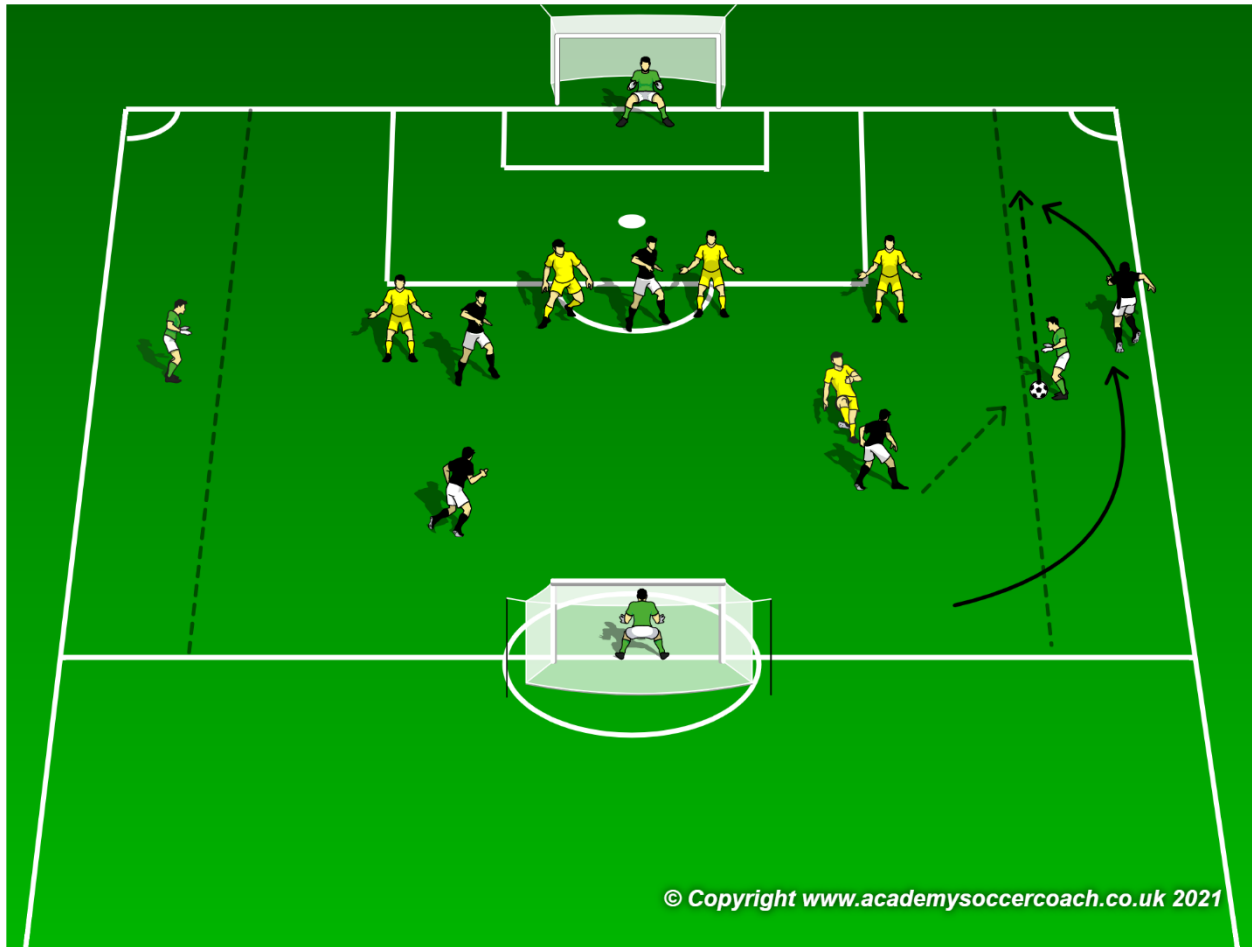
Activity 3

Now increase the complexity and play a 5v3 attack v defense situation. Set the defense on a back 3 and the attack on a Center Mid – 2 Wingers – 2 Forwards. These five are going to transfer all the learning they have got from the previous activities to these game situations. In the diagram below, the center mid passes the ball to the winger and overlaps them right away. The positional interchanges are very important to make the optimal overlaps happen.



Activity 4

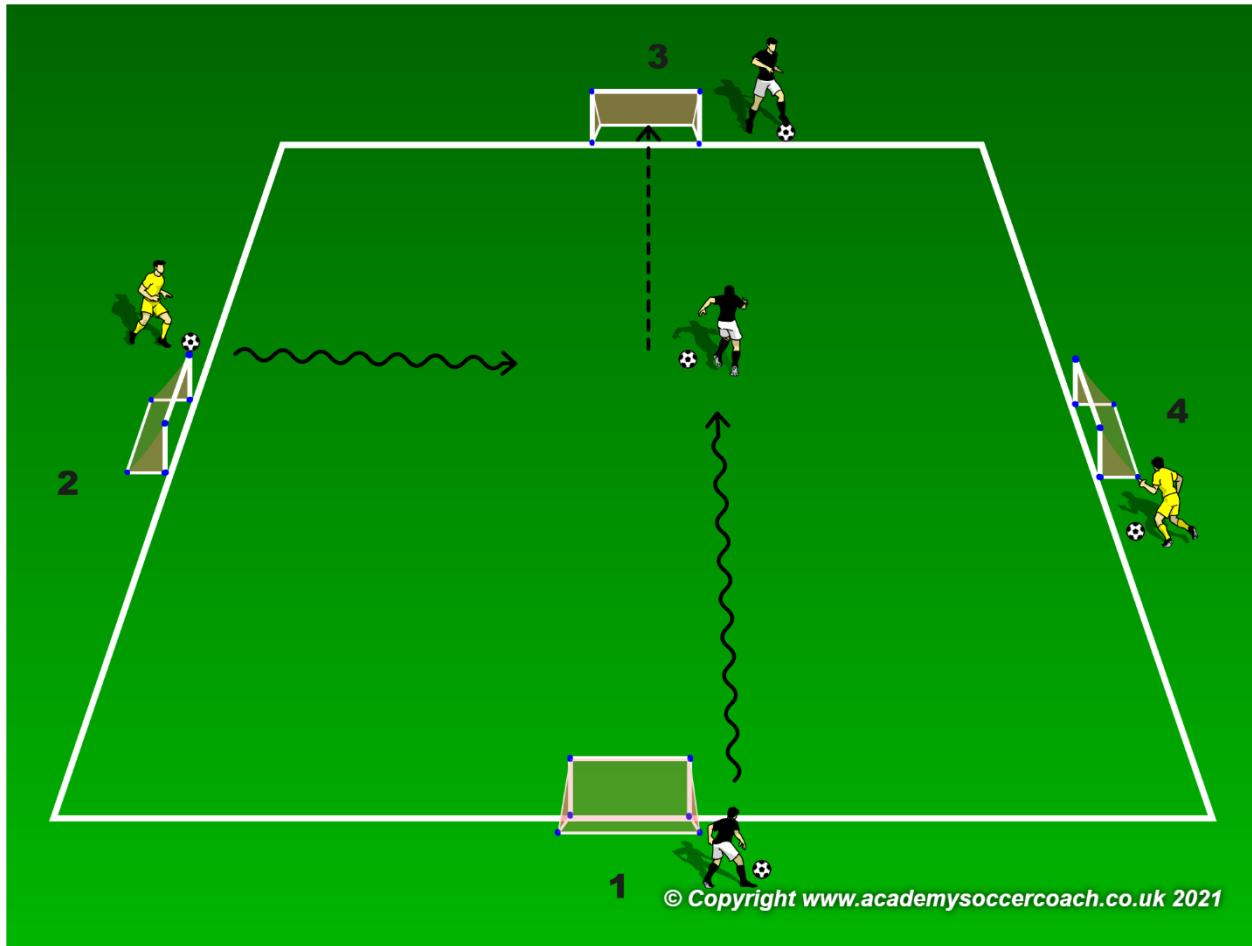
End the session with a small-sided game in a G+5 (+2) v G+5 structure. The neutrals are going to be on the wings in a set corridor. Every time a team successfully play an overlap the team gets an extra point. If they score a goal on the same play, the goal is worth three points. A goal scored in any given moment is worth two points.



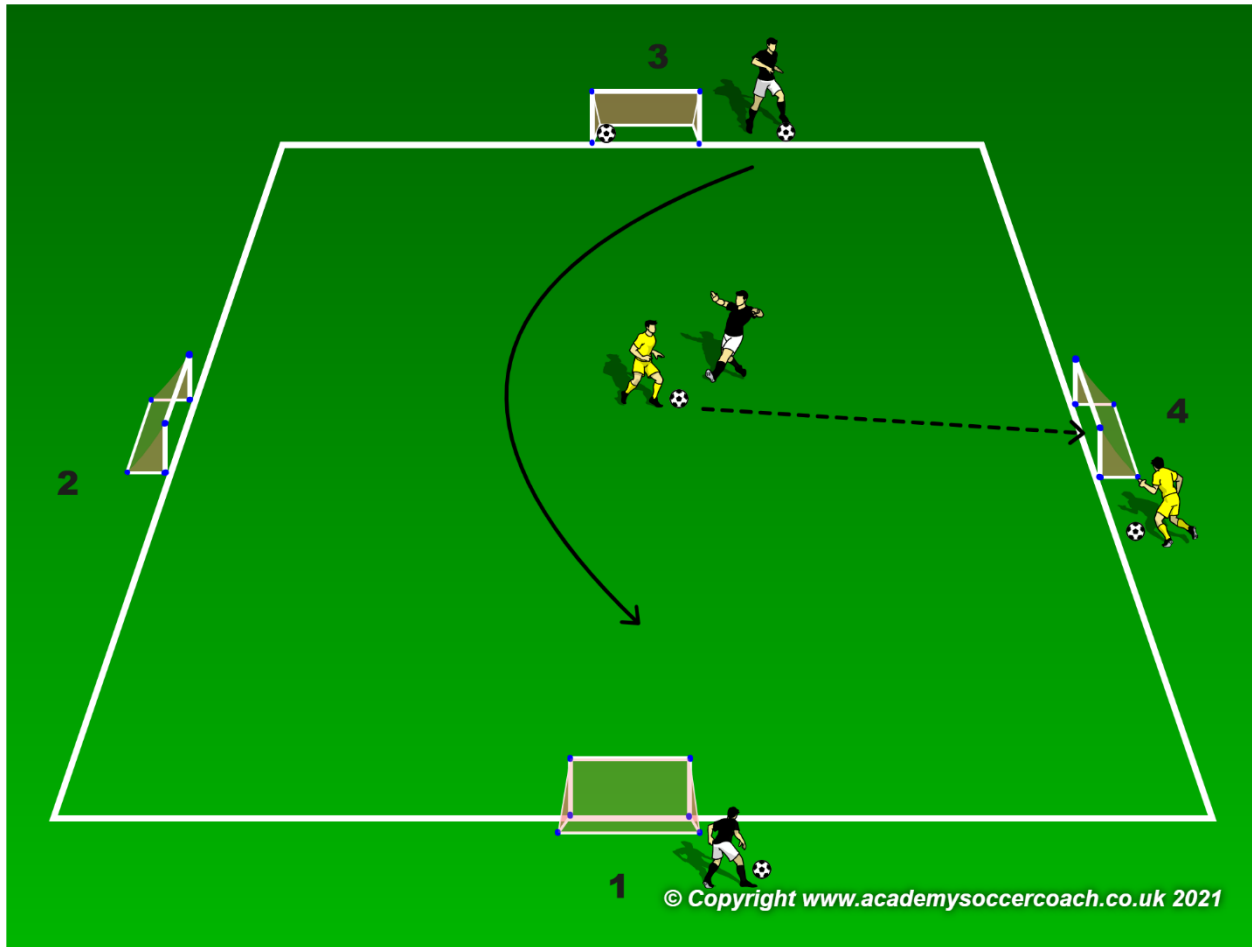
Session 9 – Score on every breakaway

Activity 1

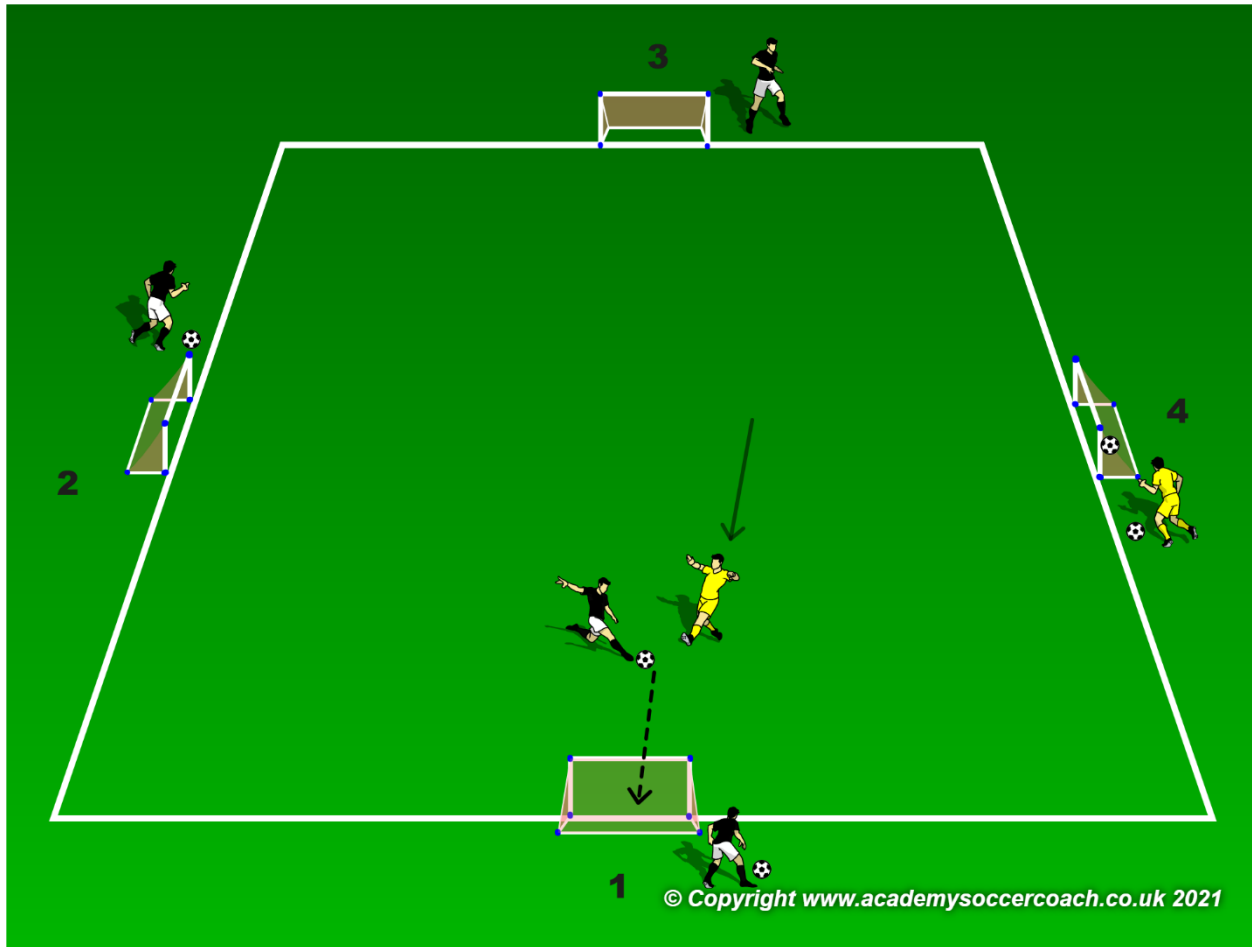
This activity is designed to have your players work on their awareness, speed and urgency. Player on goal #1 runs to score on goal #3.



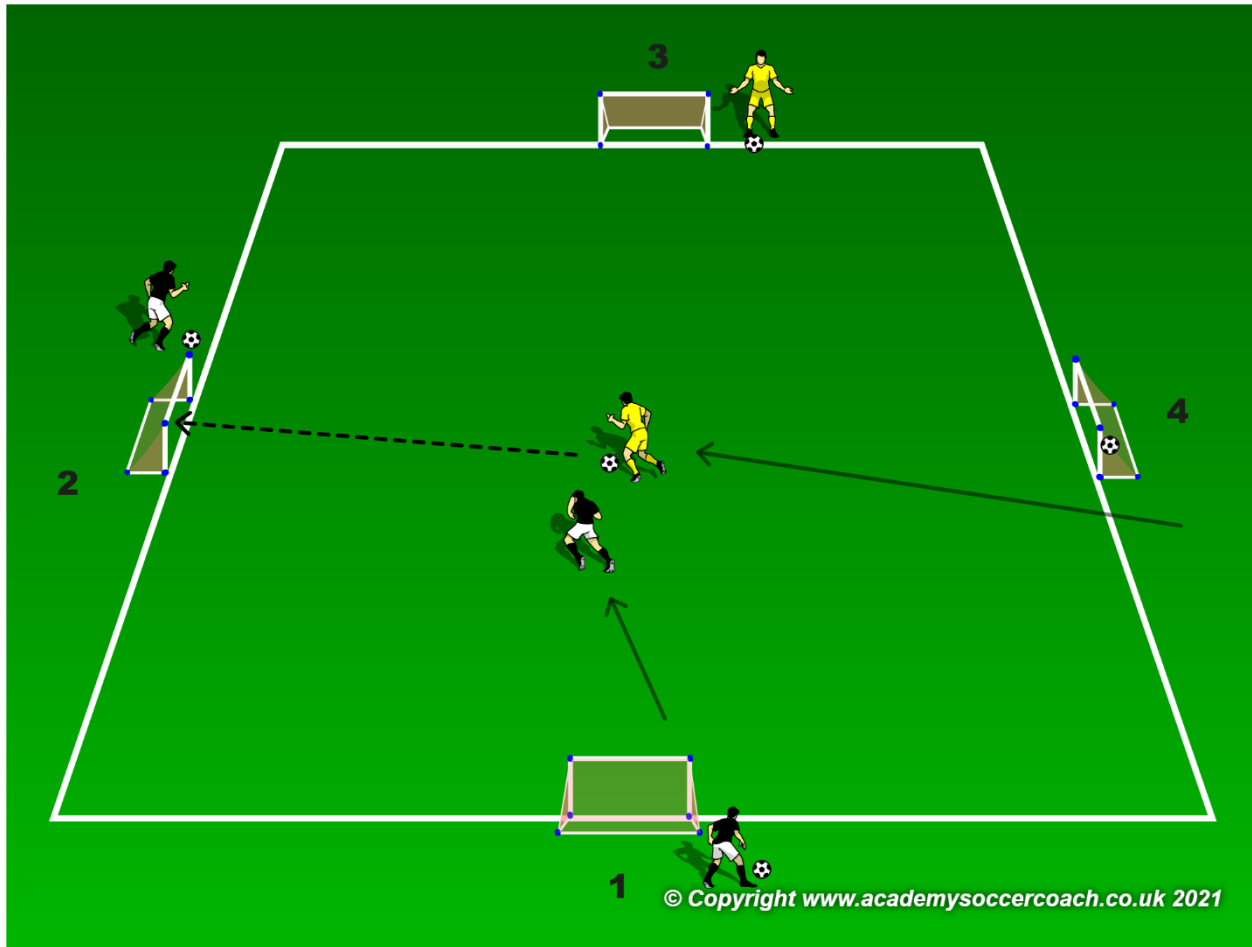
As soon as they take the shot, they must transition to defense in order to stop player from #2 from scoring on goal #4.



As soon as player from #2 takes the shot, they must transition to defense in order to stop player from #3 from scoring on goal #1.



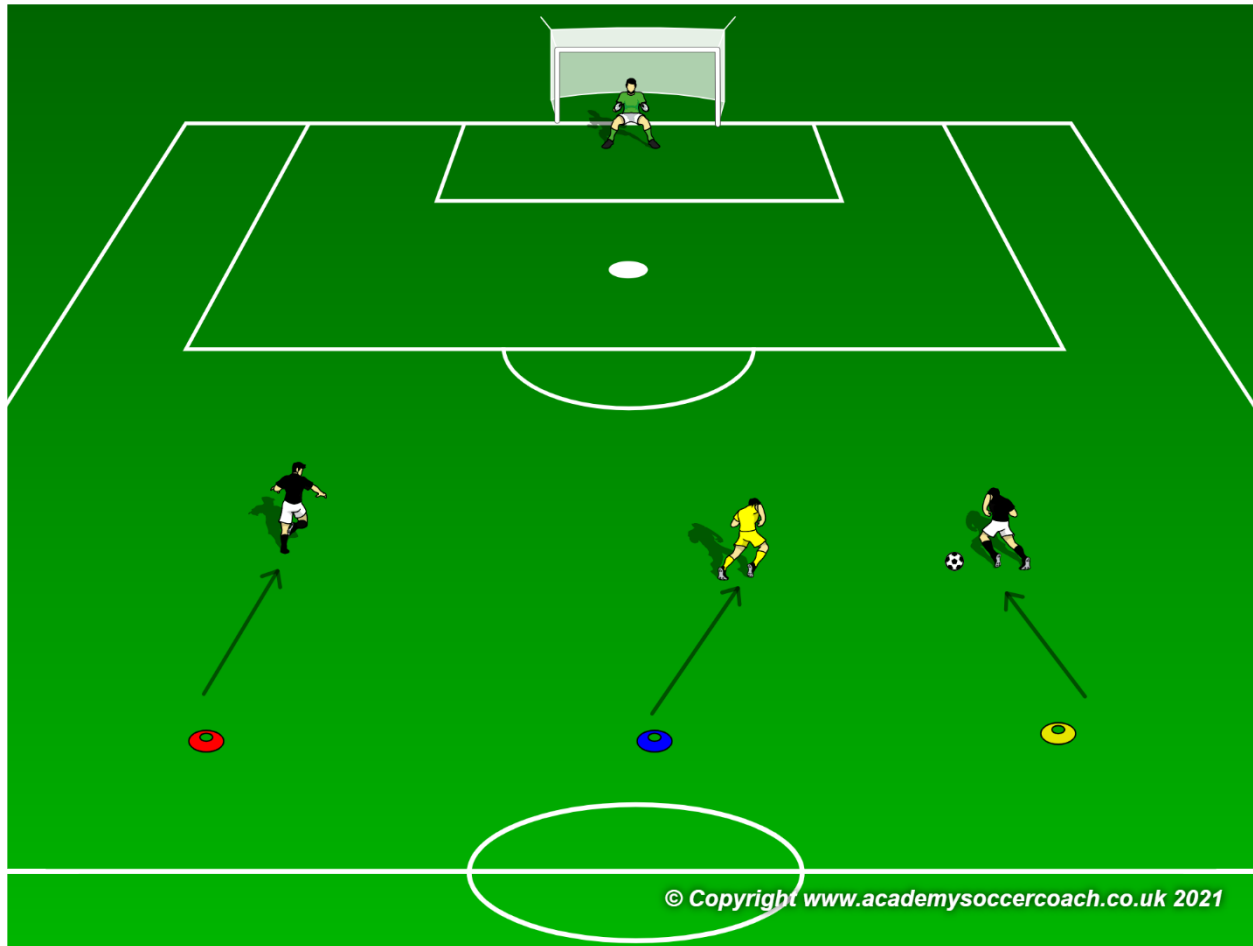
The game keeps on going round as now player from #3 must transition to defense after taking the shot to stop player from #4 from scoring on goal #2.



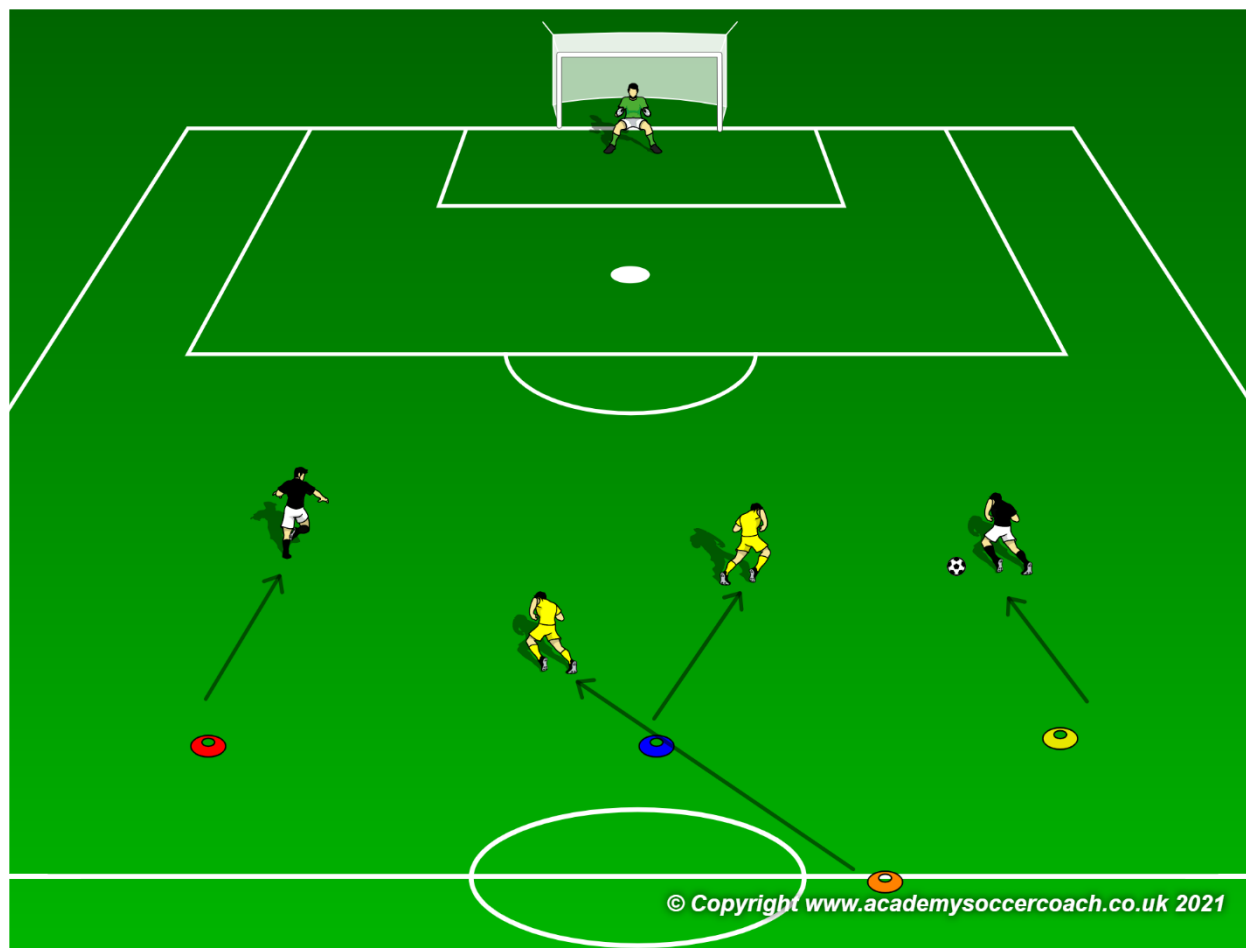
Activity 2

On this 2v1, players are going to need to make decisions quickly. All three players start from the same distance to the goal. The player in the middle is the recovering defender and the two players open wide are the attackers. On the coach's command, start the play on full speed but the 2nd attacker must be careful not to get offside.

Progress to change the defender's and attacker's positions as the activity goes on.



Another possible progression from this activity is to add a 2nd late defender coming from a bigger distance as shown in the diagram below.

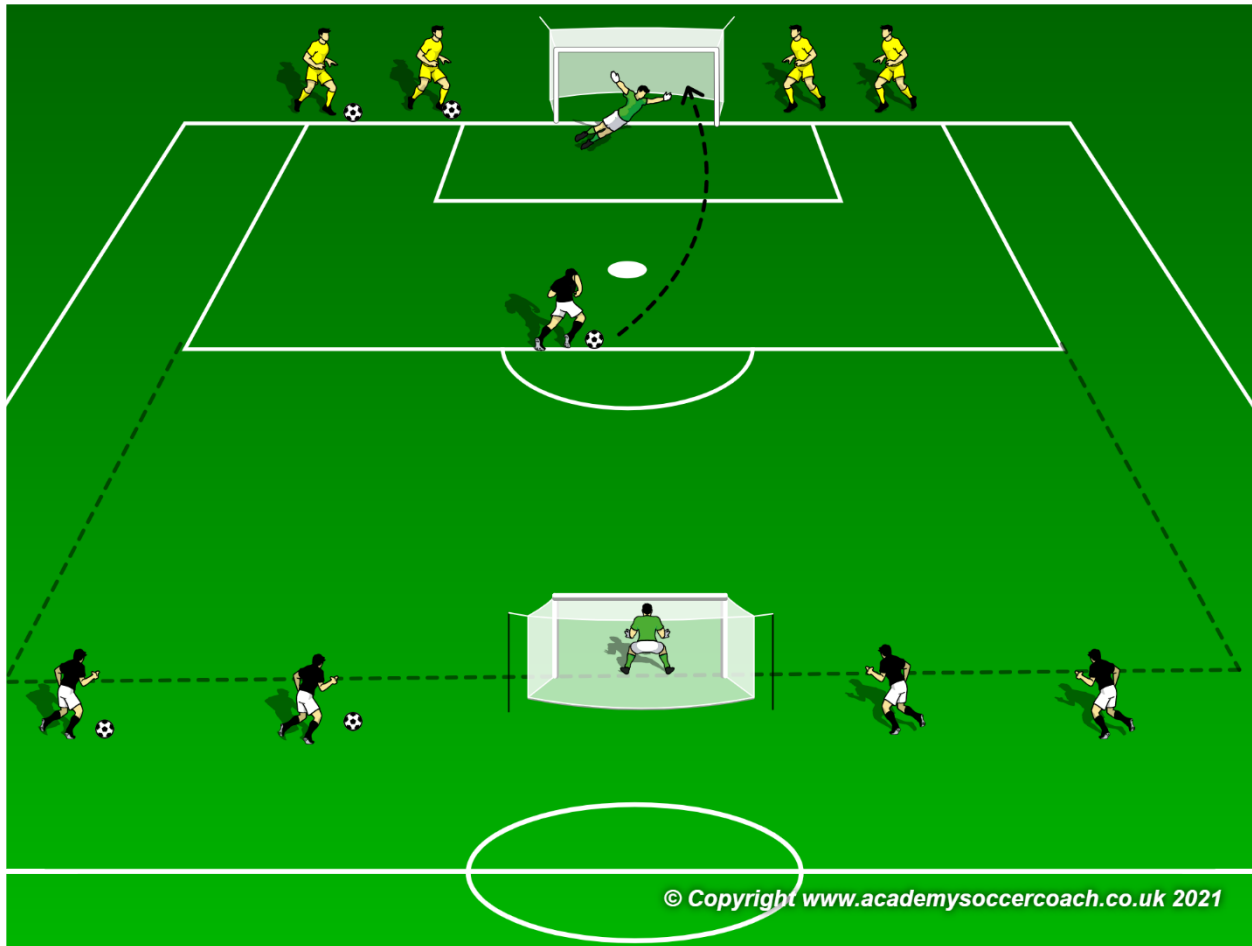


Progress as you'd like it, be creative and have your players work on a bunch of different breakaway scenarios!

Activity 3

This is a classic transitioning activity most coaches have seen or used before. I couldn't not add this one to the book.

It starts with a team running up 1 v GK as shown in the diagram. As soon as the play is over, yellows counterattack with two players, making it a 2v1 against the one player who just took a shot. When the play is finished, blacks now counterattack on a 3v2. Then yellows go 4v3, ending with blacks going 5v4.



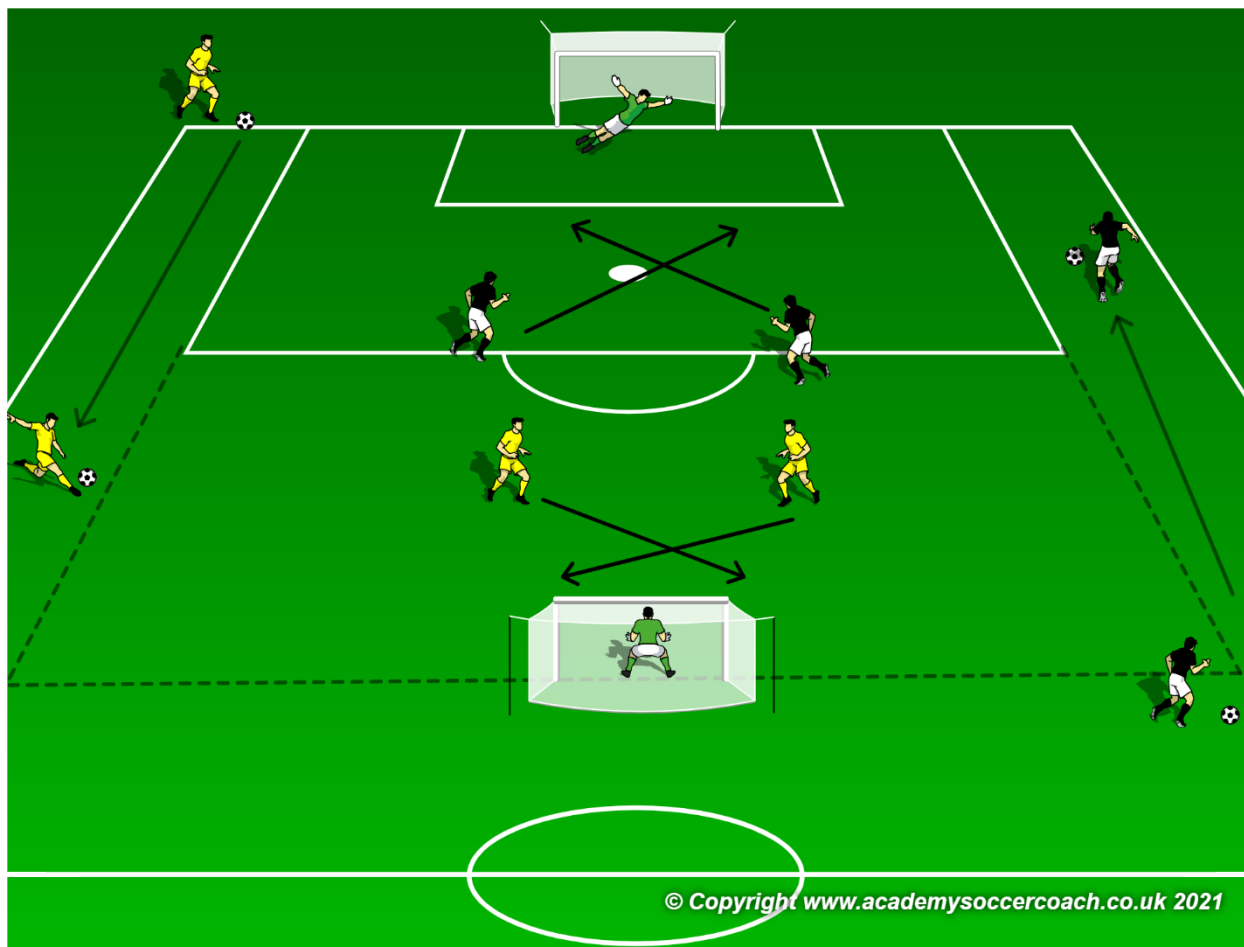
Activity 4

End with a 7v7 scrimmage where a goal scored in less than six seconds after winning the ball = 3 points.

Session 10 – Scoring from crosses

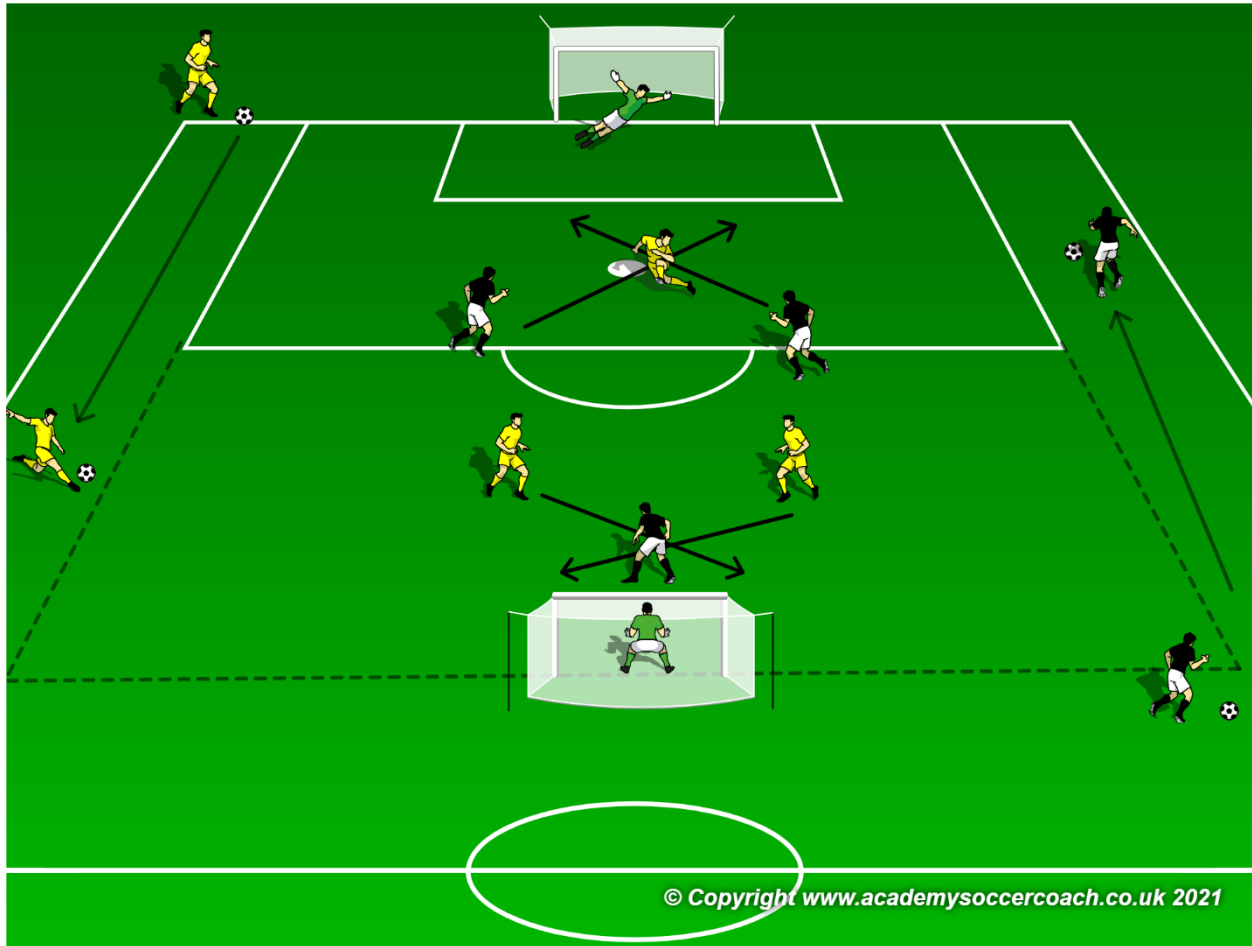
Activity 1

Have a team attacking one goal opposed only by the GK and the other team attacking another. Each team will have two strikers positioned on the box and instructed to “do the X run” as shown in the diagram. A crosser comes dribbling from his defensive corner to send a cross in so the strikers can finish. The first team to score 10 goals wins. Switch sides after a best of three rounds.



Activity 2

Progressing from activity 1, we now add a defender on each side, making it a 2v1 on each box. The first team to score 7 goals wins.

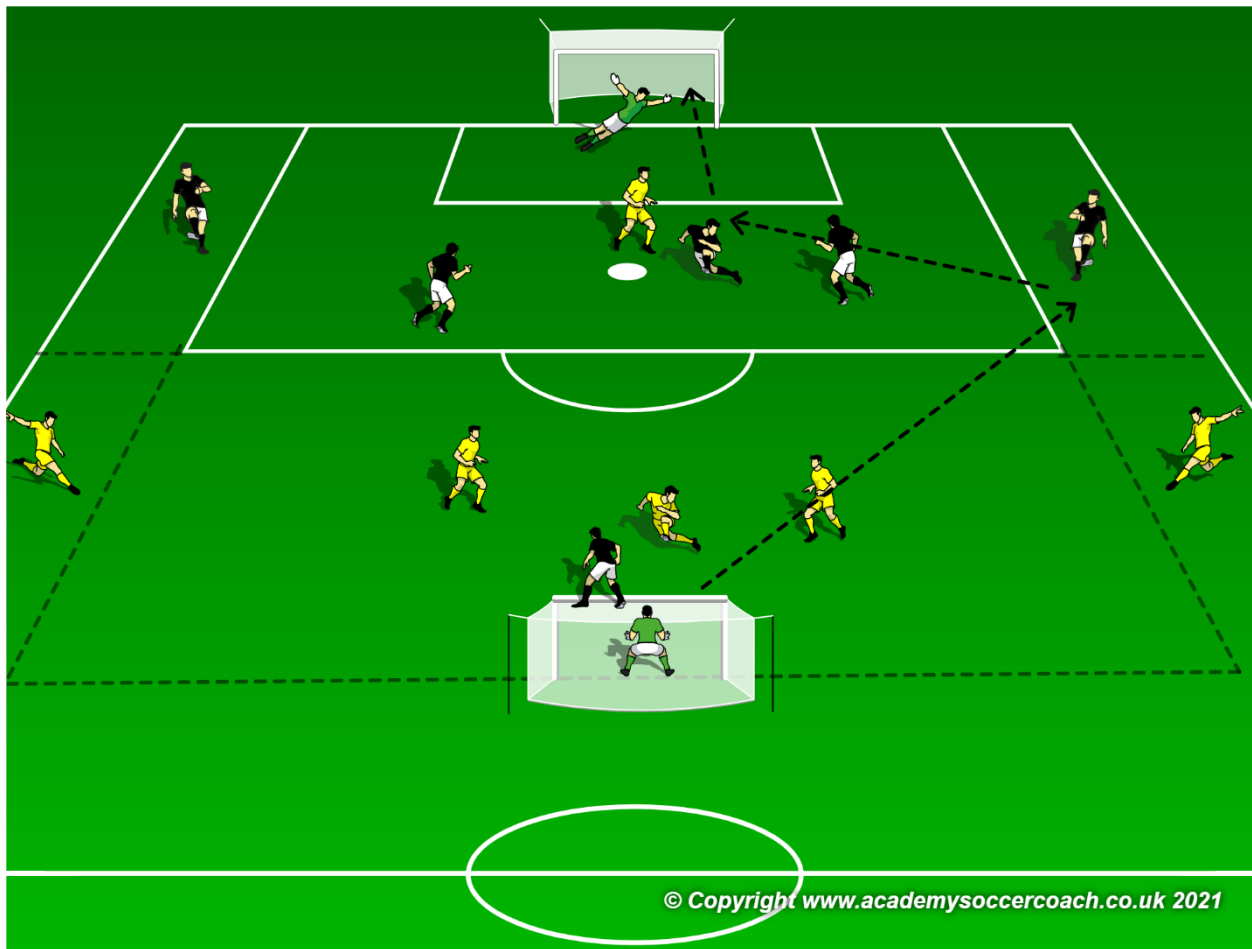


Activity 3

Play a small-sided game of an area of about two GK boxes length and the official field sized width. Every team will attack in a 2+3 v 1+GK. Two players wide in a rectangle on the attacking GK box's sides and three players in the box to score from one of the wide crossers.

Progressions:

- Opposite winger can run in to make it a 4v1
- In addition to the 1st condition, one of the attackers can run back in defense (4v2)
- Players can merge freely attack > defense and defense > attack



Activity 4

Play a 7v7 or 9v9 scrimmage where a finish from a cross = 1 point, a goal scored from a cross = 3 points, and a goal scored in any other way = 2 points.

SUMMARY

I sincerely hope you not only liked the content but also apply it into your team sessions. Adapt it as needed, increase, or decrease the complexity, intensity... make it your own!

These sessions have been applied to many different teams in a bunch of varied contexts. From U-11 to U-17 and adults, male and female teams, advanced and intermediate players.

This is not intended to be the only true and a certain recipe, but it was thought and designed to help coaches and teams to improve not only for games but, also for fun and/or for better soccer awareness. No matter the outcome on score boards, I'm sure all the parts are going to take advantage of all benefits that this rich material will bring to their lives.

The author truly hopes that you find relevant content, effective activities, useful and realistic sessions, dynamic and challenging stuff for players that will make them want to repeat over and over again!

About the Author – Daniel Carvalho

I've been playing soccer since I was 5 years old and am absolutely passionate about it. I've played at my high school and college in Brasil both soccer and futsal.

I have been coaching youth soccer players since 2010 with experience in many youth clubs in Brasil and USA such as Corinthians and Everton affiliates among others. Currently I am the D.O.C at Elleven Soccer Performance since September/2020 in Campinas-SP – Brasil.

Between 2017 and 2019 I worked for Challenger Sports in the USA with many different age groups throughout 10+ states in clubs and summer camps.

I hold a bachelor's degree in Sports and Physical Education, a CBF/CONMEBOL B coaching licence, and many other complimentary courses.